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POCKET NOVELS



The Golden Belt.



THE COLLEGE

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THE GOLDEN BELT:

OR,

THE CARIB'S PLEDGE.

BY COLIN BARKER.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

THE GOLDEN BELT:

OF

THE CARRIERS' PLEDGE.

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THE GOLDEN BELT.

CHAPTER I

THE HUNT.

THE heavy dew of the tropics was yet lying bright and unexhaled on every herb and flower; myriads of which, in most profuse variety of odor and of bloom, strewed, like one gorgeous carpet, the beautiful savannahs and wild forest glades of the fair province of Cahay.

The sun had not fairly risen, although the warm and rosy light, which harbingered his coming was tinging the small and fleecy clouds that floated, like the isles of some enchanted sea, over the azure skies. The faint sea-breeze, which murmured still among the fresh green leaves, though fast subsiding, was laden with perfumes of such strange richness, that while they gratified, they almost cloyed the senses; birds of the most superb and gorgeous plumage, were glancing, meteor-like, among the boughs; but the innumerable insect tribes, which almost rival them in beauty, had not as yet been called forth, to their life of a day, by the young sunbeams.

The loveliness of those sequestered haunts, which had but recently been opened to the untiring and insatiate avarice of Europeans, exceeded the most wild conceptions, the most voluptuous dreams, of the romancer or the poet. The solemn verdure of the mighty woods, thick set with trees, more graceful than the shades of those *Ægean* isles, where the Ionian muse was born to witch the world for ages — the light and feathery primroses, the fan-like heads of the tall palms, towering a hundred feet above their humbler, yet still lofty brethren — the giant oaks, their whole trunks overgrown with thousands of bright parasites, and their vast branches canopied with vines and creepers — masses of tangled and impervious foliage — the natural lawns, watered by rills of crystal — the rocks that reared themselves among the forests, mantled, not as the crags of the cold northern climes with dark and melancholy ivy, but with festoons of fruits and flowers that might have graced the gardens of the fabulous *Hesperides*.

It was upon such a scene, as is but imperfectly and feebly shadowed forth in the most glowing language, that the sweet dawn was breaking, when, from a distance, through the lovely woodlands, the

mellow notes of a horn, clearly and scientifically wound, came floating on the gentle air.

Again it pealed forth its wild cadences, nearer and louder than before — and then the deep and ringing bay of a full-mouthed hound succeeded.

Scarcely had the first echo of the woods replied to the unwonted sounds, before a beautiful slight hind, forcing her way through a thicket of briars, dashed, with the speed of mortal terror, into the center of a small savannah, through which stole, almost silently a broad, bright rivulet of very limpid water.

Pausing for a second's space upon the brink, the delicate creature stood, with its swan-like neck curved backward, its thin ear erect, its full black eye dilated, and its expanded nostrils snuffing the breeze.

It was but for a second that she stood; for, the next moment, a louder and more boisterous crash arose from the direction whence she had first appeared — the blended tongues, as it would seem, of several hounds running together, on a hot and recent trail. Tossing her head aloft, she gathered her slight limbs under her, sprung, at one vigorous and elastic bound, over the rivulet, and was lost instantly to view, among the thickets of the farther side.

A few minutes elapsed, during which, the fierce baying of the hounds came quicker and more sharply on the ear; and then, from the same brake out of which the hind had started, rushed, with his eyes glowing like coals of fire, his head high in air, and his long, feathery tail lashing his tawny sides, a formidable bloodhound, of that savage breed, which was, in after times, so brutally employed against the helpless Indians, by their Christian conquerors. Another, and another, and a fourth succeeded, making the vaulted woods to bellow with the deep cadences of their continuous cry.

Hard on the bloodhounds, crashing through the tangled branches with reckless and impetuous ardor, a solitary huntsman followed — splendidly mounted upon a fiery Andalusian charger, of a deep chestnut color, with four white legs, and a white blaze down his face, whose long, thin mane, and the large, cord-like veins, that might be seen meandering over his muscular, sleek limbs, attested as surely as the longest pedigree, the purity of his blood. The rider was a young man, of some four or five and twenty years; well, and rather powerfully made than otherwise, though not above the middle stature; his long, dark hair, black eye, and swarthy skin, told of a slight admixture of the Moorish blood; while the expression of his features, though now excited somewhat by the exhilaration of the chase, grave, dignified, and noble, bespoke him without a doubt, a polished cavalier of Spain.

His dress, adapted to the occupation which he so gallantly pursued, was a green doublet, belted close about his waist by a girdle of Cordova leather, from which swung, clinking, at every stride of his horse, against the stirrup, a long and basket-hilted Bilboa blade, in a steel scabbard, which was the only weapon that he wore, except a short,

two-edged stiletto, thrust into the belt, at the left side. A broad sombrero, with a drooping feather, breeches and gloves of chamois leather, laced down the seams with silver, and russet buskins, drawn up to the knee, completed his attire. He sat his horse gracefully and firmly, and the ease with which he supported him, and wheeled him to and fro among the fallen trees and rocks, notwithstanding the fiery speed at which he rode, bespoke him no less skillful than intrepid as a horseman.

The chase continued for above an hour, during which every species of scenery that the level portions of the isle contained, was traversed by the hunter; the open forest, the dense swampy brake, the wide, luxuriant savannah!—and each, at such hot speed, that though he turned aside neither for bush nor bank, though he plunged headlong down the steepest crags, and dashed his charger, without hesitation, over every fallen tree that barred his progress, and every brook or gulley that opposed him, still, it was with no little difficulty that he contrived to keep the hounds in hearing.

And now the hapless hind, worn out by the sustained exertions, which had, at first, outstripped the utmost pace of her pursuers, but which availed her nothing to escape from foes, against whose most sagacious instinct and unerring scent, she had but fleetness to oppose, was sinking fast, and must, as the rider judged, by the redoubled speed, and shriller baying of his hounds, soon turn to bay, or to be run down without resistance.

Her graceful head was bowed low toward the earth, big tears streamed down her hairy cheeks, her arid tongue lolled from her frothing jaws, her coat, of late so sleek and glossy, was all embossed with sweat and foam, and wounded, at more points than one, by the sharp thorns and prickly underwood, through which she had toiled so fruitlessly. Still she strove onward, staggering and panting in a manner pitiful to witness; and the deep bay of the bloodhounds was changed, suddenly, into a series of sharp and savage yells, as they caught a view of their destined prey.

Just at this moment, the hind had reached the verge of a piece of dense and tangled woodland, through which she had toiled for several miles, when the low range of hillocks which it overspread, sank, suddenly, by a steep and craggy declivity of twelve or fourteen feet, having, at its base, a rapid stream, brawling and fretting over many a rocky ledge, down to the level of a wide and lovely meadow.

Situated nearly in the center of this flower-sprinkled lawn, half circled by a deep bight of the streamlet, and perfectly embowered by the canopy which a close group of waving palms spread over it, there stood an Indian dwelling. It was of larger size than were most of the native cottages; thatched neatly with the broad leaves of the palm, and ornamented, in front, by a portico of wooden columns, quaintly, and not ungracefully adorned by carvings, wrought by the flint-edged chisel of the yet unsophisticated savage.

A mat, woven with tasteful skill from many-colored and sweet-scent-

ed rushes, was spread upon the floor; while several stools of ebony, inlaid with shells, and sculptured with grotesque devices, were ranged along the walls. On a projecting slab, which apparently supplied the want of a table, stood several gourds, ingeniously manufactured into cups and trenchers — some bowls of hard wood, even more highly finished than the other articles of furniture, and many ornaments of gold and strings of pearls, scattered, in rich profusion, among the humbler vessels of the household.

From three of the columns, were suspended large wicker cages beautifully interlaced with intricate and quaint devices, containing paroquets and other birds of splendid plumage; while, from the other, hung carved war-clubs, of the ponderous iron-wood, flint-headed javelins, and several bows; not the short, ill-strung, worthless weapons used by the Africans; but long and tough, and admirably made, and scarcely, if at all, inferior to the tremendous long-bow which had gained so much renown, and wrought so much scathe to their foes, in the hands of the English archery. Under the shadow of the portico, sheltered by it from the warm beams of the sun, there sat an Indian youth, tall and slightly framed, and not above sixteen or seventeen years of age, at the utmost, polishing, with a shell chisel, the shaft of a long javelin; on the lawn, in front of the cottage, a bright fire was blazing, and several native females were collected round it, preparing their morning meal, with cakes of the cassava baking among the hot wood embers, and fish broiling on small spits of aromatic wood. But at a little distance to the left of these, at the extreme end of the building, nearest to the steep bank which terminated the grounds, outstretched in a light grass hammock, which was suspended at the height of two or three feet from the ground, between two stately palm trees, and swaying gently to and fro in the light currents of the morning breeze, there lay the loveliest girl that eyes ever looked upon.

Her rich, black hair, braided above her brow, and fastened with one string of pearls, was passed behind her ears, whence it fell in a profusion of glossy curls, so wondrously luxuriant, that, had she stood erect, it would have flowed quite downward to her ankles; her eyes, large, dark, and liquid, as those of a Syrian antelope, were curtained by the longest and most silky lashes that ever fringed a human eyelid. Her features classically regular and even, were redeemed from the charge of insipidity by the sly dimple at the angles of that exquisitely arched, and rosy mouth, which Aphrodite, fresh from her ocean cradle, might have envied; and by the voluptuous curve of the soft chin. Her complexion was of a warm and sunny hue, half brown half golden, through which the eloquent blood mantled at every motion, like the last flush of sunset upon the darkening sky.

Beautiful, however, as was the countenance, and enchanting the expression of this Indian beauty, it yet was not until the second or third glance, that the eye could stray from the matchless symmetry, the untaught graces, and the voluptuous and wavy motions of her

form, to notice the less striking charms of her face and feature. Her beautiful arms, bare to the shoulder, were adorned with massy rings of virgin gold, so flexible, from the purity of the metal, that they were twisted and untwisted, with as much ease as though they had been silken cords; the right hung over the edge of the hammock, its small and graceful hand resting upon a little stand or table at her side; while the left, folded beneath her head, was half veiled by her abundant hair — her dress, a single robe of soft, fine muslin, was clasped on the right shoulder by a golden stud, whence it passed under her left arm, leaving her bosom half exposed, and was girt round her slender waist by a cord of gayly-colored cotton, covering the rest of her person down to the tiny feet.

Such was the scene, and such the occupants of it, into which, darting with a momentary energy that gained convulsive strength from the near presence of her dreaded foes, the hunted hind leaped suddenly. The craggy bank and stream were cleared by one tremendous bound, the level lawn was traversed with a speed that seemed almost miraculous, yet scarce two spears' length from her haunches the furious blood-hounds followed. Whether it was that her eyes were cast backward toward her dreaded foes, and that her every sense was engrossed by agonizing terror, so that she marked not any thing before her — or whether a strange instinct taught her that no danger was to be apprehended from that quarter, the shy and timid creature dashed straight across the lawn, passing within ten paces of the fire, from the vicinity of which the women fled, fearful of the savage hounds, and sank down with a deep, broken-hearted sob, close to the hammock of the Indian beauty.

Roused suddenly from the half-dozing, dreamy languor, in which she had been so luxuriously indulging, the maiden started from the couch; and without thinking of the peril, by an involuntary impulse, stooped down, and lifting up the head of the dying hind, wiped away the foam from its sobbing lips, and gazed with wistful pity upon its glazing eyes.

All this had passed, as it were, with the speed of light, for not ten seconds had intervened between the first appearance of the trembling fugitive, and the compassionate movement of the young girl.

It had happened, too, that, as will oftentimes occur, when hounds are running at the utmost of their speed, the blood-hounds, since they had viewed, for the first time, the quarry, had given no tongue, chasing solely by the eye — so that, until his attention was called to what was passing by the flight of the terrified and trembling menials, the youth had remained quietly engaged at his occupation, unconscious of the peril to which his sister — for such was the relationship between them — was exposed.

Diverted, however, from his occupation by the tumultuous flight of the girls, he looked up quickly; and, at a glance, beheld the hind fall dying at his sister's feet, the fierce hounds dashing forward to glut their savage instinct in the life-blood of the quarry, and the

girl, by her own arm thrown as it were into the very jaws of the literally bloodthirsty brutes, which, with hair erect and bristling, as if instinct with sentient hate and fury, the white foam flying from their tusks, and their eyes glaring with the frantic light of their roused nature, were bounding toward her, scarce three paces distant.

At the same point of time, the Spanish cavalier, who had while they were running mute, lost the direction of the chase, made his appearance at the top of the abrupt ascent; and seeing, as if by intuition, all that was going on, lifted his blooded horse hard with the Moorish bit, on which he rode him, and pricking him, at the same instant, sharply with the spur, undismayed by the sheer fall of the ground, compelled him to take the fearful leap.

The horse sprang nobly at it, and, aided by the great fall of the surface, landed his hind feet well upon the level ground beyond the rivulet; but even then he would have fallen, such was the shock of so steep a drop-leap, had he not been met by the quick support of a master hand, so that, recovering himself with a heavy flounder, he dashed on, after scarce a moment's pause. Still, had there been no readier aid than his, the maiden must have perished beneath the fangs of the infuriate blood-hounds; for, though the hunter shouted in the loudest tones of his clear, powerful voice, rating the dogs, and calling them by name, their fierceness was so thoroughly aroused, that they paid not the least regard to his commanding accents, and probably would not have been restrained, had he been interposed, himself, between them and the object of their stanch pursuit, from springing on their master who had fed them, and to whose slightest gesture, under more favorable circumstances, they were implicitly obedient.

But as he saw them, already well nigh darting at her throat, that stripling leaping upon his feet, and snatching from the nearest pillar a bow which fortunately happened to be strung, and two long arrows, in less time than is needed to describe it, notched a shaft on the sinew, drew the tough bowstring to his ear, and drove the whizzing missile, with almost the speed of light, toward the leading dog.

It was not till the whistling shaft hurtled close past her ear, that the maid was aware of her danger; for, engrossed by the faint struggles and waning breath of the poor deer, she had not raised her eyes, till she was startled by the sound of the passing weapon; and now, as she lifted them and met the red glare shot from the angry orbs of the foremost hound, and almost felt the warmth of his quick, panting breath against her brow, hope left her, and her senses yielding to the sudden terror, she sank down upon the body of the dead hind, as helpless and as innocent.

But, even as light left her eyes, the well-aimed shaft had reached its mark; directed at the throat of the animal, it flew, and the keen flint head, cutting a little way below the ear, clove through and through the neck, piercing the jugular vein — the blood gushed in a torrent from the wound, nor from that, only, but from the throat and nostrils, and with one savage yell, he leaped into the air, and fell quite

dead within a yard of the Indian girl, whose snow-white dress was actually sprinkled with large goutts of the crimson gore.

Still she was far from safe, for, unchecked and undaunted by their leader's death, others of the little pack, baying tremendously, were close at hand. Again the bow was raised, and the string drawn to the utmost, but with a jerking and irregular tension, which snapped the tendon of which it was framed; with a sharp twang the bow recoiled, and the shaft fell harmless, close to the archer's feet, but, unarmed as he was he bounded forward, and grasping the staff of the unstrung and useless bow, he gallantly bestrode the body of the damsel, and, with a calm and resolute expression in his clear eye and comely features, awaited, fearlessly, the onset of the approaching savages.

And now the first was close upon him, and with his bristles all erect, like quills upon the porcupine, and with a deep, stifled growl, dashed at his face. Still he blinched not, but made a desperate lunge with the tough, horn-tipped bow, full at the open mouth and yawning throat of his assailant; well for him it was, that his eye was true, and his hand steady; for nothing else could have availed, even though now the cavalier was within three strides of the spot, to save his life.

The thrust took effect, and though the weapon was but ineffective, and the beast not materially affected by the blow, it still had force enough to check, in some degree, the violence of his assault, and hindered him from using his fangs for the moment. Yet, notwithstanding, such was the weight of his sinewy lithe body, and such the terrible impetuosity of his attack, that, checked and foiled as he was, he still plunged so violently against the breast of his young antagonist, that he dashed him to the ground; and, himself falling, they rolled over and over with a stern grapple and fierce cries, on the ensanguined greensward.

But, at this critical moment, a new and more important aid came up, in the young Spaniard; who, dashing his spurs into the flanks of his Andalusian, with his long, two-edged sword unsheathed and brandished in the air, as he stood upright in his stirrups, purposely galloped over one of the hounds, sending it cowed and howling to a respectful distance, then pulling up his horse close to the confused group, well knowing the tremendous fury of the animal with which he had to deal, when it is thoroughly aroused, he snatched the other, which was struggling with the boy, and which had just got free from his gripe, just at the junction of the neck and scull.

So true and steady was the blow, and so keen was the temper of that thin, two-edged blade, that it clove right through muscle, bone, and sinew, severing, entirely, the head, except where a small portion of the skin remained uninjured, at the farther side; this done, he hastily dismounted, and striking the fourth and last dog a heavy blow with the flat of his sword, rating him, at the same moment, by his name, succeeded in asserting his ascendancy over his crest-fallen vassal.

The boy had, in the mean time, risen from the ground, still grasping in his hand the bow, which, during all the progress of that tremendous struggle he never had let go, and gazed, half-doubtful of the stranger's purpose, into his eyes — till reassured by the grave smile which played upon the features of the Spaniard, and by perceiving how effectual had been his aid, when earthly aid seemed hopeless, he suffered the tense muscles of his dark visage to relax, and stretching out his right hand to his preserver, uttered a few words in the Spanish language, not strictly true in the pronunciation, but in a voice of most melodious richness, thanking him for his timely aid.

But little heed did the young gallant pay to his address, for he had thrown aside his blood-stained weapon, and raising the slight body of the maiden from the earth, for she had not, as yet, recovered from her fainting-fit, bore her, as easily as though she had been but a feather's weight, with her head leaning on his shoulder, and her long tresses flowing in dark luxuriance over his arms, into the sheltered portico. Placing her on one of the low, cushioned stools, and supporting her against his breast, he called aloud, in the Indian tongue, which he spoke fluently and well, for water, and having received it in a gayly-decorated calabash, sprinkled her lovely face, and set about restoring her with a degree of eagerness that savored not a little of the gallantry of knightly courtesy. Nor was it long before his efforts were crowned with complete success, for, in a moment or two, the fringed lashes partially arose, revealing the dark eyes still swimming in unconscious languor.

Dazzled by the full light, she once again suffered the lids to fall, and remained for a few moments, perfectly passive in his arms; although he felt by the increased pulsation of her heart, which throbbed almost against his own, that life and sense were speedily returning. Again she raised her eyes, and gazed, for an instant, with an air of simple wonderment in his face; then, while the warm blood rushed back in a crimson flush to the pale features, she attempted to start from the half-embrace in which he held her.

"Fear nothing, gentle one," he said, in her own liquid tongue, with a calm, placid smile, which did more to reassure her than the words which fell, half-unheard, on her ear, yet confused and giddy — "fear nothing, gentle one from me. Not for the wealth of the whole Indies — not to be monarch of Castile, would I work aught of harm to thee or thine!"

While he was speaking, her eye wandered from his face, and falling on the blood-stained group which lay confusedly piled on each other — the lifeless limbs of the dead hind, the fierce hounds, one transfixed by the unerring arrow of the brother, the other slain by the sharp rapier which yet lay beside them on the turf — the panting charger which stood, although unfistened, perfectly quiet in the cool shade of the palm-trees, and the two dogs which had survived their fellows, couched humbly on the grass before the portico their tongues loll

ing from their jaws, their sides panting from their late exertion, and their eyes closed listlessly — she saw the truth intuitively, and with a quiet smile sank back again, upon his breast, unable yet to rise, and lay there, until her brother had brought forth the females of the household to attend her.

Leaning on these, the fair girl left them with a gesture of farewell as dignified, yet easy, as though she had been the lineal scion of a hundred European monarchs. She was not absent long, however, yet she had returned ere the Spaniard had learned from his host, while he was busily employed in wiping and returning to its scabbard his trusty rapier, in picketing his charger, and securing his two hounds, that the girl whom he had so bravely rescued from a terrible and painful death, was, in good truth, of royal birth. Though the daughter of a Spaniard, she was the child of a Caribbean princess — the niece of that peerless Queen Anacnona, who, though the sister of that most dauntless foe of the white invaders, the valiant Caonabo, lord of the Golden House, had proved herself from first to last, the friend and patroness of the pale strangers, who, in after days returned her kindness with ingratitude so base and barbarous.

In short, Guarica returned, and thanking her preserver with the most feminine and easy grace, pressed him to stay and share their morning meal — and he, half-captivated at the first by her artless beauty, assented wilhagly and lingered there, enchanting the simple mind of the Indian beauty by all the rich stores of his cultivated intellect, and listening, in turn, to the sweet native ballads which she sang to him in her rich, melodious tongue — not till the morning meal alone was ended, but through the heat of the high noon, and even till the dewy twilight; and when he said adieu, a tear swam in the dark eye of the maiden, and her small hand trembled in his grasp — and he rode pensively away beneath the broad light of a noon, a thousand times more pure and brilliant than that which silvers the skies of his own bright land, bearing along with him, deep in his heart of hearts, deep thoughts, and high, warm feelings, blended with doubts and cares, and the engrossing nebules of interest conflicting with the wilder passions of a hot and impetuous nature.

Nor did he leave behind him, in the breast of the young Guarica, sentiments less novel, or feelings less tumultuous; truly, to them, that day was the hinge whereon the doors revolved of future happiness or misery: for, from that day, each dated a new life, fraught with new wishes, and regulated by new destinies — and to each was it the harbinger of many strange adventures, of many joys and sorrows, and whether for evil or for good, of their doom here, and it may be, hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOVERS.

DON JUAN RODRIQUES, the father of Orazimbo and Guarica, was a Spaniard of the old blood, but of an impoverished family, whose records of former grandeur had made a lasting impression on the young man, who had inherited nothing save the pride and ambition of his race. But of this class of men the most daring adventurers were found to follow in the road to wealth which Columbus had first tracked across the ocean. With education, tact, and courtly manners, they brought unheard of cruelty and fraud into the new land.

Some of these men ingratiated themselves with the Indian tribes, where they were at first received kindly, and a few, with more craft and forethought than the rest, managed to maintain an unbroken influence with the chiefs, either by profuse and worthless presents or by intermarriage with their daughters.

To such, a valuable trade between the tribes and the old country became almost a monopoly; and while some grew rich by rapine and violence, others pursued a safe and far more lucrative course by maintaining a crafty friendship, alike with the chiefs and the Spaniards. Don Rodriques was one of these. The great object of his life was gold — gold enough to rebuild the fortunes of his house and live over again the splendor of past ages.

To this end he lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself with the Carib chiefs, whose simplicity of character made them easy dupes to kindness, while their valor had more than once repelled hostile aggression with triumph. Rodriques was a man to follow the safer and quieter track to wealth, and his ultimate success gave good proof in the end that his course was the most certain.

Partly from a roving fancy and partly from a wish to gather up the unappreciated wealth of gold, pearls, and precious stones that existed among the Indian tribes, with as little regard paid to their true value as if they had been pebble stones instead of jewels, Rodriques wooed and won the most beautiful native of the island, who, all unconscious of the grasping cupidity which actuated his motives, believed her love to be the one great charm which kept him from his native land.

Here, trafficking with the Indians, as crafty men have bargained with them from the time that civilization first intruded its chicanery upon their innocence, Don Juan became a man of vast wealth and

importance, both with the natives and the Spaniards stationed at the forts and the different trading-stations of Hispaniola.

His intercourse and more than friendly relations were kept up with the Indians even after the death of his wife, and so much of affection as he could spare from the one great object of his existence, was bestowed on Orazimbo and Guarica, who, knowing little of his true character, held him in profound reverence.

The home which Rodriques had built and embellished for his children, partook both of the simplicity of the wild tribes and the refinement of old Spain. With magnificent forests and green savannas all around, giving wildness and grandeur to the front of his dwelling, he had laid out a broad garden in the rear, inclosed by a noble cactus fence, which in the season encompassed it with a mighty wall of flowers.

It is somewhat depressing to look upon a well-cultured garden in full bloom, if it be in a northern country, for the disagreeable thought will intrude, that all this glowing diversity of colors, all this blooming world with its atmosphere of fragrance, must soon perish, and in its stead the dreary sight of snow-drifts alone will meet the eye; but how pleasing, how invigorating the idea, when while we are gazing upon a scene of loveliness, that no capricious breeze may suddenly destroy it, but that from year to year we can still look upon the picture, blushing at its own loveliness, and apparently never perishing, but always reproducing.

The garden of the Spaniard was inclosed by a high fence, that no vulgar gaze of curiosity might be directed upon its inmates, who were seldom more than his daughter and two fawns, which, although captives, had never felt the pangs of captivity, nor know themselves prisoners in such a paradise with such a mistress. Here in a spot which ever sparkled in the unclouded rays of the sun, among myriads of flowers, from the beautiful coffee-tree to the humblest indigenous plant, the young Guarica grew up, and, as if taking her nature from the brightness which continually surrounded her, she was ever volatile and happy.

With a thoughtless indifference to futurity, like the birds that sang around her, she warbled her songs with them, and as the bright and transparent sky above her, her disposition was ever silvery and unclouded. Nature had gifted her with an intellect, energetic and well arranged in all its faculties; with this and an inextinguishable longing to drink deep at the crystal fountain of knowledge, and an opportunity of possessing books and time necessary for reading, she had accumulated a stock of information without the aid of instruction from others, which might even compare with those who have had all the advantages of civilized life.

Guarica, at the time our tale commences, had just entered the sunny age of sixteen, when the dreams of youth are all stamped with glowing colors, and when the most somber hues of our dreams would make a rainbow more vivid than that bright one which glows

in her air skis of Italy. Like her fawns, she ran wild in her garden, and her breast had no other little care. Care! she had not yet heard of that foul fiend which frequents the abode of misery, but seldom ventures among the children of the sun.

In the center of his garden Rodriques had erected an arbor, which was characteristic of the luxurious taste of the Spanish. Creeping vines, which bore flowers of many a charming hue, and exhaled a thousand delightful odors, completely shaded the bower, and hid those within from distant view. In this fairy spot, the happiest blending of the work of nature and of art, the young Guarica occasionally retired to dream away the hours with her book. With nothing to fill her eyes but the beauty around her, and the dark shadows of the forest, which inspired no other sensation than those of pleasure — for any object of great natural beauty, however forbidding it may appear to others, will invariably excite in our breasts a sense of gratitude.

One fair summer's day, Guarica had fallen asleep in her bower. Every thing around had sunk into that calm repose which characterizes a sultry day in southern hemispheres. The feathered tribe had sought the deep shade where they sat silently enjoying the gentle breeze which scarcely ruffled their downy bosoms. Even the noise from the fort had ceased, and every thing appeared to partake of that languor which imperceptibly creeps upon us during the meridian of a sultry day. As she slept, the high and luxuriant shrubbery which grew around the arbor was disturbed, and Hernando de Leon looked in upon the sleeping girl.

"Gentleness and innocence have been symbolized by the image of a lamb, and why not by that of a sleeping woman?" exclaimed Hernando, as he gazed upon that sweet face in its unconscious sleep. She lay with her finely-modeled arm carelessly pressed against the cushion by her burning cheek, and her small white hand protruded from a profusion of raven hair, which partially hid her face, and presented a glowing contrast with her skin. Little did the sleeping girl imagine that the eyes she had been dreaming of ever since they met her own, were now gazing upon her so eagerly as she lay in the careless and untutored attitude of slumber.

A fawn, which had been sleeping near, by the wondrous acuteness of its auditory nerves, detected a slight noise; it sprang up with a bleat and licked its mistress' face, who awoke, and the intruder found himself standing before the young girl, whose eyes met his enraptured gaze.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, starting up, and the deep tint of her cheek at once expanded over her face and neck; "why did you not wake me?"

"I could not, Guarica," he exclaimed, passionately.

"You could not! and why? it needed but a breath or a slight movement — I sleep like this fawn," said she with laughing carelessness, which was intended to conceal her confusion.

"It were sinful," said the lover, in a low tone,— "it were almost a sacrilege to break in upon a repose so sweet and calm. I would as soon think of disturbing the sleep of an invalid after protracted watchfulness; that sweet sleep was as calm as the ocean with the silver moonbeams sleeping upon its bosom."

"All of which means that I was sleeping soundly," she said, attempting to braid back her hair; meanwhile she broke into a light and gay song, while her lover knelt down and gazed in her deep eyes, with mingled admiration and love, but it was only for a moment — she started up, and, placing her hand on his shoulder, said, "Hernando, you must leave me; for one will soon be here who must not see you — leave me, I entreat you, and another time we may meet."

A cloud passed over the features of the young man, but only for a moment, and like the wind which brushes over a field of ripe grain, caused a momentary shade.

"For the wealth of Goleonda, I would not be the cause of your receiving an angry look from your father."

"Oh, it is not he — I can not tell you now; but take this flower, nourish it in water till it fades, then come again."

Hernando took the blushing flower, pressed it fervently to his lips, and placed it near his heart. He arose; lingered at the door; made an effort to start, and yet tarried; — he sank again on his knee before her; folded her little hand in his; pressed it to his lips, and hurried out of the arbor.

Through many a cluster of variegated flowers he followed the serpentine path — now stooping to pass under the widespread branches of the fig-tree, which was purple with delicious and fragrant fruit — now stooping to pluck some flower, whose vivid and peculiar tints attracted his eye, or else to catch some of the lazy chameleons which, with their green and brown backs exposed to the sun, were almost dormant, could be gathered up in handfuls.

In fact, the wildest dreams of fairy scenery could not equal the spot where Hernando now stood — it was a little paradise of itself; the senses yielded to the luxury strewn upon the earth, and he felt its enervating influence. Imprecptibly he sunk into calm and deep tranquility — the charming scenery, the fragrant air, and the beautiful Guarica all floated sweetly through his mind. Every word and look of the young girl convinced him of her love, and with that certainty upon his soul, he slowly threaded the forest-path which led to the fort.

CHAPTER III

THE RIVAL.

A FRENCH authoress of celebrity says, that "love is but an episode in the life of man, but that it is the *whole life* of woman." Had she looked deeper into mankind — or rather *womankind* — she certainly would not have made that assertion, for the breast of woman is capable of containing all those noble passions and sentiments which make humanity most beautiful, although love is the needle which constantly guides them through the ocean of life; but in the storm that sweeps the ocean, they are often thrown out of their regular track. When they are constrained to lay aside their compass, and steer with an unflinching courage before the wind, woman can command a spirit even more expansive than that of the boasted "lord of creation."

But it is only during a storm that woman can bring into requisition this otherwise dormant spirit. When the calm arrives, she naturally resorts to her compass, for although *love* is *not* woman's "*whole life*," affection is as natural to her as it is for a bullet to rise in quicksilver. Who would imagine that the gentle, the innocent Guarica, whose disposition was as gay as a bird's, could be capable of any thing sterner than love. She loved every thing around her, and in her gayety and happiness appeared to be composed of no human passions grosser than those which make up the sweetness of affection. She loved the flowers, she loved her fawns, the birds, and, in fine, every thing that came within the compass of her existence; therefore *one* who had gazed upon her expanding charms, till he had become completely fascinated, imagined of course that a large portion of this love could only be bestowed upon himself. With this gentle and affectionate disposition, joined to a sweet unconsciousness of her own loveliness, it is not wonderful that a man who had been encouraged to look upon her as his own should feel secure of possessing her entire regard.

Don Guzman de Herreiro was a Spaniard, with whose haughty family the father of Guarica had been intimate in old Spain. It was a proud race, partially impoverished by their own pride, but still pure blood made it of consequence in Rodriques' eyes, and he had long ago promised to mate his daughter with young Herreiro. During Rodriques' absence, Guzman had continued his visits to one whom he considered his affianced bride, and it was the presence of this man in her home which had impelled Guarica to send her lover away so early.

A few hours previous to Hernando's visit to the garden, the Spaniard strolled out to enjoy the picturesque scenery around him. In his promenade he drew near the arbor where Guarica usually resorted, to while away the heat of the day. He found her perusing a work of his native country, and so absorbed was she that she did not for some time observe the Spaniard standing at her side. His heart swelled with delight as he gazed upon her youthful countenance. Like his countrymen, he imagined that women were made but to submit, and that to speak to her of his ardent passion was sufficient to have it reciprocated, no matter what impediment stood in the way. She started upon seeing him, and her face slightly reddened, but not as the Spaniard thought with maiden diffidence. He threw himself upon the cushion by her side, and, taking the book out of her hands, exclaimed, upon glancing at its contents :

"Ah ! Lorenzo Gracian ! that author is too grave and moral for thee; thou art a flower which needs must blush in the sun's rays — this book is too shady; thou shouldst trace the bright, the sunny gayety of *Pa tre de Almeida*, whose imaginings are more compatible with thy disposition — shall I procure them for thee ! "

"I have them, sir; but there are times when we prefer graver subjects, and that time is now."

"By heaven ! I did not think a woman capable of comprehending graver subjects; the light and the gay were made for woman — come, cast that volume aside, and listen to what I would say to thee," and the Spaniard cast the book among the roses which grew around the arbor. "Guarica," he exclaimed, retaining her hand in his, "we have now cast from us the grave and the thoughtful, to indulge in thoughts more tender; dost thou ever discourse upon love, Guarica ? "

"It is a subject which becomes not one of my age; some years must pass over my head before I shall be capable of discoursing upon that subject. I would much prefer, senor, to read my book which you tossed among those flowers — could you not reach it for me ? "

"Were I capable of reaching to the top of yonder tall palm, I would not," said the Spaniard, and a shade passed over his features. "What wouldst thou with that cold book, the writings of a man who would have us live by a code of prescribed laws, which might be congenial to an anchorite, but not to thee? come, be gay; why, I never saw thee so grave; thou certainly hast caught the contagion from that book."

"I have read the book, and must say, in its praise, that it may be conducive of much good."

"Give me that book — I'll take it home and burn it. Come Guarica, be gay; thou hast already imparted to me a portion of thy obtuseness; sing me a song — it has been a long time since thy voice gladdened my heart; canst thou not sing ? "

"No; I am hoarse from exposure in the night air."

"Canst not talk gayly with thy bird voice ? "

"No, no; I am sleepy; if you will leave me I will repose upon this cushion."

"Indeed, not I. I came to talk with thee, and I *will* talk with thee, and if thou art too stubborn to answer me, why, I will do all the talking myself, and thou shalt listen: it will be something pleasant even to know that thou art listening."

"Then talk sensibly, or I will stop my ears."

"I will discourse most eloquently upon love."

"I will not listen to it from thee."

"And why not from me?"

"You should not speak to me of love."

The Spaniard's eyes flashed fire. For some time he bent his angry eyes upon the ground, and his dark mustaches curled down as if he were on the eve of making an angry retort, when remembering for what business he had visited the arbor, he resolved to adopt persuasion.

"Guarica, dost thou love thy father?"

"Ah! indeed, I do," she exclaimed; "he is my only parent; my mother died before I could feel her loss. My poor young mother!"

"And is it not the duty of those who love their parents to obey them?"

"If their commands are within the bounds of reason, then it is the duty of their children to obey; otherwise it is not justifiable."

"And thou wouldst be willing, Guarica, to obey thy father? for he is a just man, and would not demand of thee that which was not strictly right — thou wouldst be ever ready to please him by complying with his slightest wishes?"

"I would."

"It was by thy father's command, Guarica, that I seek you for a wife; and it was his request that thou shouldst listen to me."

"Am I not listening? If it was his request, I will sit silently and listen till evening to what you may please to say."

"Then I will tell thee, Guarica — since thou art grown up — that thy father considers thee now of sufficient age to marry."

Guarica started at these ominous words, and an expression of deep anxiety crossed her countenance.

"Indeed! I can not listen to that subject," she exclaimed, vehemently; "my youth, methinks should yet be a barrier to these addresses, especially in the absence of my father."

"So, at last, you refuse to obey your father?"

"It would be impossible for my father to sanction this without previously apprising me of it."

"But he *did*, lady; I am not in the habit of uttering falsehoods," replied the Spaniard, whose anger now began to break bounds; but he curbed it, and with all the eloquence he could master, pleaded his passion.

With a spirit as haughty as his own, she spurned his addresses, and treated his love with disdain. The Spaniard lost all self-control.

Completely thrown off his guard, he sprang up, and heaped upon her the most passionate reproaches, but Guarica, with a spirit equal

to his own, confronted him, and with an eye keener than his — but lovely in its fierceness — she gazed disdainfully upon him.

Even the angry Spaniard was struck with surprise at her fearless attitude as she suddenly stepped up to him : her beautiful neck was flushed, and her forehead burned with hot crimson. The Spaniard gazed upon her delicate form, as she drew it up to its greatest height, and recoiling from her energetic and quick eye, he rushed out of the arbor, swearing that no earthly power should tear her from him.

As soon as he had left the arbor, the spirit which had sustained Guarica deserted her; she threw herself on the couch, and burst into a flood of tears. She strove to compose herself, but she could not calm the turbulence of her passion; the strength which she had exerted to sustain herself so firmly before the Spaniard, had deserted her, and she felt faint and drowsy — she fell upon the couch, and soon lost all sense of trouble in a deep sleep, where Hernando found her slumbering, as we have described.

But we must follow the angry Spaniard, who walked the garden for some time in order to regain his composure. He had not gone far when he discovered the form of a man, who emerged occasionally from behind the bushes, but who appeared by his actions to be striving by every means not to be observed by those in the house. Concealed behind the bushes, he watched this man as he advanced toward the arbor.

With caution he drew close to the spot which he had just left, and heard the voice of Guarica. His breast heaved with a thousand wild emotions. How changed was that voice since it addressed him! All its rich music had returned, and like the gay warblings of a bird, it rang merrily on his ear.

Like a viper, the Spaniard drew near, till he had a fair view of the lovers, and their voices in the slightest whispers could be distinctly heard. With his teeth firmly set, and his eyebrows drawn over his eyes, and his breast heaving like the ocean in a storm, he gazed upon the happy couple, and little did they imagine that any thing so deadly to the bright hopes which gladdened their hearts, was near them. The Spaniard watched them with the keen gaze of envy, and the slightest shade of feeling did not pass over Guarica's features which he did not see. He was mad with jealousy, for he now saw that love, which he had imagined had not yet received its birth in the youthful heart of Guarica, had arrived to maturity, and had already been lavished upon one whom he hated above all others.

A glance full of meaning, and of dazzling beauty, may cause many pleasurable emotions, but that depends altogether upon whom it is directed; the tell-tale glances which the enraptured Hernando drank from the lustrous eyes of Guarica were poison to the lurking Spaniard, and when she pinned the blushing flower over his breast, the lurker cursed it, and wished that it had been an asp instead of a flower. He would have sacrificed all he was worth, could it have

secured the death of his rival; still he possessed not sufficient courage to attempt a deed which he feared might end in the destruction of himself, — for, after all, he was a coward.

After Hernando had taken his leave, Guzman left his hiding-place, and walked toward the house; his rage had settled down to that calmness which is most to be dreaded; for then judgment and the reasoning faculties are not blinded.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CARIB'S PLEDGE.

The next day Hernando mounted his charger, and went forth to the forest. Guarica's flower had withered, though he had kept its stem in crystal water all night. He was impatient to hear her voice again, athirst for the sweet words that told him of her love. As he galloped through the forest, followed by the hounds that had learned to crouch at Guarica's feet and play lovingly with her fawns, a figure stepped suddenly across his path and seized his horse by the bit. The horse, restive at feeling a strange hand near his head, made an attempt to rear, but the Carib savage drew him back to the earth with a wrench of his strong arm, and, before Hernando could speak, was looking him gravely in his face.

"Come with me, stranger, there is a black cloud over this path."

"I am used to danger, chief, as some of your tribe may know," said Hernando, smiling, as he touched the hilt of his sword.

"Vipers are not killed with weapons like that," answered the chief; "it is with them you have to deal."

"Well, what of them? I prefer an open foe, like the warriors of your tribe. You are an enemy to our people, but now and straight forward what other assailant need I fear?"

"We are foes to the Spaniard, but not to you. Come, and I will show you the snares which white men lay for each other."

"But what if this were itself a snare?"

The Indian drew a knife from his belt, and seizing Hernando's hand in his iron grasp, pierced a vein with the point. Applying his lips to the cut, he drew a mouthful of blood and swallowed it. Then dashing one clenched hand against his broad chest, he exclaimed, with vehemence:

"The blood of my pale brother flows here. What Carib ever betrayed his own blood?"

Hernando knew that this was a sacred pledge, and turning to the Indian, with a smile, bade him lead on.

The Indian did not smile, but his eyes broke into a blaze of delight, and, with a gesture, he plunged into the forest.

Some four or five miles from the place of their encounter lay a stretch of swampy land, dark and dismal as stagnant water and the slimy growth of swamp vegetation could render it. Many a rough passage and deep gully lay between the broad savannas and this dreary spot; but the savage passed them without halting, and Hernando followed, though his good steed grew restive with the broken path. At last they came out on a precipice which it was impossible that the horse could descend.

"Leave your beast here — he will be safe," said the Indian pointing to a footpath which wound like a black serpent down the precipice.

Hernando dismounted, tied his horse to a sapling, and prepared to follow his guide on foot. With a step as firm and more rapid than wild goat's, the savage took to the path. Hernando followed. With a fearless and steady step, they wound their way still on the edge of the precipice, till the moon had risen, and flung her luxuriant gilding upon every object. They now walked more rapidly, and soon took a southern course, and began to descend. Hernando now understood where he was going. The continual and monotonous cries of the frogs, and the tall trees with their long festoons of Spanish moss — which hung over the alluvial bottom, like the curtains of a funeral pall — indicated sufficiently that they were approximating, or had already reached the Cypress Swamp. Many a slimy toad hopped croaking out of their way, as they advanced in the swamps, and the angry scream of some huge "swamp owl," as it flapped its broad wings, and malignantly snapped its bill at them, gave him a hint that it was time to tread warily in the tracks of his guide, or he might suddenly be precipitated headlong into the mud and slime, for they were approaching the interior of the swamp.

After walking for some time, till even the Indian, whose knowledge of that country was unlimited, was constrained to step with extreme caution, for fear of sinking into the deceptive mud, they stopped. The scene around bore a terrifying appearance — not one step farther could they advance, without being overwhelmed in mud and water. As far as the eye could see, by the imperfect light which penetrated that dismal spot, was but one sickening sight of the green mud and water, where no human foot could tread without sinking ten feet or more, to find death at the bottom.

"Look upon that spot," said the savage, pointing with his finger to a pool of stagnant water; it had the appearance of being deep, and a large green frog sat on a broken stump that floated there, with his gray eyes fixed upon them, and with his hind legs drawn under him, as if preparing to leap into their faces. Hernando turned his eyes away from this loathsome sight. "That spot," continued the savage, still pointing toward it, "that spot was to have been my white brother's grave."

"What!" exclaimed Hernando, recoiling. "What you say can not be true. Who could make that spot my grave? Is this a time for trifling with me, chief?"

"It is not, my white brother. I did not bring you here to play with your feelings, but to save your life. You look at me — you would inquire what interest I have in saving your life. Listen: it was a great many summers ago, when a Carib chief went out to shoot deer; he walked all day — no deer — he sat on a log, tired and hungry; while he sat there, weak and tired, almost asleep, a crouching panther sprang upon him and bore him to the earth; the Carib fought hard, for he was fighting for his life, but he was weak and hungry, and the panther seized him and was bearing him off, when a white man, who heard the noise, came running to the spot. He, drawing his knife like a true warrior, jumped upon the enraged animal's back, and stabbed him to the heart. The Indian was saved. The white man had a warrior's heart — he took from his wallet some provisions, which he gave to his starving brother, and bade him eat, then he walked off. The Carib's heart swelled, and when the pale man had disappeared, he fell upon one knee, and called the Great Spirit to witness, and he swore an oath; he swore in the presence of that mighty Spirit, to protect all in whom that pale man's blood flowed."

"That man was my father," interrupted Hernando; "I have heard him tell that story many times; and what became of the Carib?"

"He stands before you! Now will my pale brother suspect me of playing with his feelings? But stay. The Carib became a great chief in his nation, and sat in the councils of Caonabo. He still hunted in these woods, and as he hunted, three suns ago, sounds came to his ears, more terrific than the swamp owl's, for it was not the sound of defiance, but of cowardly murder. Two men advanced; your brother, who did not wish to be seen, stepped behind a tree. It was a big captain of the fort, and a man whom I have seen taking care of the horses at the fort — a slim-faced Spaniard, with eyes like a snake's; their looks were black, and they talked of murder; your brother understood, for he had learned their language in trading with them; they struck upon the track that we have just passed — what would they in this track, for no game can live here? Your brother followed them cautiously, and the slim one cursed my white brother, because he loved a daughter of the Spaniard whose mother was a Carib princess, and he swore he should be killed, and hid from his comrades in the black heart of the cypress swamp. I left them, and hunted you — here we are!"

Hernando was thunderstruck at what he heard; a feeling of horror pervaded his frame, as he looked around on that dismal spot. The tall trees above them bore no other verdure than the rank Spanish moss, which swept the swamp far and wide, and the dark green water, with its thousand loathsome reptiles, was horrible to look upon.

"My brother must keep a sharp eye about him — he must play the fox, and if the Spaniards are too strong, send this belt to Orazimbo, and he will find your brother, who will come to your help though he must bring as many warriors as there are leaves on the trees."

Hernando took the belt, which glittered richly even in that murky light; for it was a girdle of virgin gold, flexible from its own purity, with a rivulet of burning opal stones, rough emeralds, and rude gems running through it like a rainbow.

"It was my mother's girdle," said the chief, while a grim smile played upon his features without disturbing them. "Does my brother think a Carib would part with that save as the hostage of good faith? The fair woman who waits for him night and morning in the broad hunting-ground, which the Great Spirit paves with his stars, would cover her face in shame and never sing more, were that pledge to go unredeemed."

Hernando took the belt reverently, and placed it in his bosom.

"It is a noble pledge, and before the blessed lady whom I worship, shall be right reverently treasured till we meet again, though heaven forefend the evil strife you speak of."

"It will come," said the warrior, gravely, "and when it is upon you, send the belt to Orazimbo. He will know where to find your brother."

"How shall I thank you for this noble kindness?" said Hernando, deeply moved and reaching forth his hand.

"Your father saved my life," was the simple reply.

"But that sprang from an impulse of common humanity, while this has forethought — persistent generosity."

"He saved my life — I save yours. Well, let us go."

With this the warrior turned into the narrow path, and they left the swamp together.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASSASSINATION.

THE next day, as Don Hernando de Leon mounted his horse, a subaltern, whom he had more than once had occasion to reprimand, came to his bridle-rein and asked humbly what direction he would take to the hunt. "A tiger had been tracked to the eastward toward the Cypress Swamp," he said, "and a company of officers had already ridden forth. Perhaps the senor would like to join the sport?"

At first the young man was tempted to dash his gauntlet in the ruffian's face, but, on second thought, he answered carelessly :

"By our Lady, it promises brave sport ! but which course did they take ? If I had but a guide now !"

"Ah ! that is what I was about to offer. I know every inch of ground."

"But you have no horse."

"No animal living can out-travel me, senor."

"Well, well, strike off at once. I am all impatience."

Directly the two men dashed into the forest. After half an hour the guide took the very direction which the Carib chief had traveled with Hernando the day before. When they reached the precipice, the man pointed out the narrow path which led downward into the swamp.

"It is somewhere below that the tiger finds a jungle. Hark I ! hear voices."

Hernando listened ; a voice certainly sounded from beneath them, but it was only that of one man, and in the distance recognition was impossible.

"It looks gloomy and dark like a swamp below there ; besides, one can not descend on horseback," he said, dismounting and moving toward the edge of the precipice. "If some of our friends would only come out now and tell what sport the beast promises."

"Nay, we must descend before any tidings can be heard," said the subaltern, anxiously.

"Then we will return ; this dismal scene beneath has a forbidding look, and there is possible sport in the uplands at all times," said the young man with seeming indifference, though his glance was keen and vigilant enough as the guide followed close to the precipice, always keeping a few paces behind.

Still, wary as the fox he had been recommended to imitate, Hernando leaned forward as if to obtain a better view of the dark scene below. Then the man who lingered behind gathered himself and made a leap. Hernando turned suddenly and caught the assassin in his powerful grasp, thus saving himself from a fall of five hundred feet.

"Ha, villain !"

"I thought that you were falling, my lord, and leaped forward to save you," said the villain, with prompt falsehood.

"What, with a dagger in your hand ? — tush now !" With a twist of the arm, he wrenched a poniard from the hand he had grasped and pushed the wretch away. "There, begone ! I have tested you," he said, with keen scorn.

"What do you mean, my lord ? a hunter always has his knife ready."

"And a wise man keeps a sharp eye upon him — out upon you, hound ! — have you no gratitude that I did not dash your foul body over the cliff ?"

"Upon my soul — by the blessed Virgin, most worthy senor."

"Tush! again go tell your employers that I know how to protect my life from better hands than a miserable assassin. Tell them that I am resolved *not to be thrown into the black heart of the Cypress Swamp!*"

The assassin started back thunderstruck. By what witchcraft had De Leon got information of his secret? Possessing it, what hope was there for his own life? In that strong grasp he had been helpless as a child; nothing but craft could avail him now.

Hernando held the poniard loosely in his hand while he stood gazing on the wretch with a scornful smile on his lip.

"Poor coward!" he said tossing back the weapon disdainfully, "your knife soils my hand."

"Coward!" roared the bravo, brandishing the weapon over his head, "come on, if you dare! Coward! what ho! down yonder — ho to the rescue!"

Hernando drew the as yet unused dagger from his belt and, with cool collected action, advanced steadily on his antagonist, who retreated backward from the precipice step by step, brandishing his weapon with the fury of desperation. His vehement gestures and crouching attempts to spring upon him, baffled Hernando for an instant — but it was only for an instant. Grasping his weapon firmly in the right hand, while his left arm was lifted to guard against the fierce lunge which the wretch was making at his face, he advanced on his assailant, who commenced a retrograde movement, brandishing his sword about with desperate trepidation.

As Hernando pressed upon him, he crouched down to escape the blade that seemed leaping at his throat, made a spring on one side, and fell. The next instant Hernando had a hand on his throat and one knee on his breast. With the strength which intense fright will sometimes bestow, the wretch almost threw his antagonist off; but on the instant his throat was in an iron clutch and the glittering poniard quivered above his heart.

The shrieks for help which rose from his coward heart were strangled in his throat, but his wild eyes, full of awful terror, pleaded abjectly for life. Hernando drew back his blade to strike the assassin dead, but dropped his hand in utter loathing of so mean a victim.

The wretch took courage as he felt the grasp relax on his throat, and shrieked out:

"Oh, do not kill me — take pity! I am a poor man, unworthy of your powers. Spare me — in the name of the blessed Virgin, spare me!"

Hernando arose and spurned the craven aside with his foot.

"Keep your base life," he said, stooping for the assassin's dagger which he cast over the cliff. "I will not ask who is your employer, but tell him when I do know his name, it will be to defy and degrade him to a level with the tool I thrust back upon him with loathing and contempt. Tell him not to tempt my forbearance again, or when I have him by the throat, it will be his last moment of life."

The bravo answered nothing, but slowly writhing himself from that relaxed grasp, sprung to his feet, and plunged into the forest.

Don Hernando had already mounted his horse and rode away, when the figure of his assailant might have been seen wending down the precipice to the black heart of the Cypress Swamp, where his employer awaited his coming with keen anxiety. When once together in the gloomy shades, bitter words passed between the two, which ended in a transfer of gold and deeper flattering.

"Well," said Don Guzman, "there is one way left. Speak at once with the Indian whom you told me of; his aim will prove more certain."

The eyes of the bravo kindled. "Don't taunt me in that way, senor. I did my best, but that man has the strength of a fiend!"

"Well, well, he is not good enough for Spanish steel — a flint arrow will do the business better. Now back to the fort. My servants will swear you have never left it, if any one inquires — but do not forget the Indian."

The bravo slunk away eagerly, feeling at the gold in his pocket, and Don Guzman followed at his leisure, returning through the forest with horse and hound, as if it had not been a human life he had failed in hunting down.

That night two men passed the sentinels, giving the watchword, and proceeded to the apartments of Don Guzman de Herreiro. One was the man who stood with him at the Cypress Swamp; the other, who flung off a huge cloak and sombrero, proved to be the Carib chief who had given Hernando his belt.

"It is half an hour past the time, and I began to fear that you would be late," he said; "you look pale."

"I did not rest well last night. Did you say I was too late?"

"Oh, no, just in time — but who comes now?" He started, and his heart began to beat, but seeing only an Indian advancing, he took a seat.

The savage stalked into the room, and striding up to Guzman, said, "You sent one of your runners for me — what do you want?"

"Take a seat, chieftain, and I will explain to you in what manner I wish to engage your services, and for what purpose. War is your principal occupation, I believe?"

"When the Carib has an enemy, he kills him; but it is not the white man's business to pry into our affairs — what would you with me?" said the savage, in his usual loud and stern voice.

"I would have you kill a white man for me."

"Ha! ha! why does not the white man do that himself?" said the chief, with a guttural laugh.

"Because I have other affairs to attend to; chieftain do you see this poniard? it once belonged to a king; it shall be yours as soon as you kill him."

"Ough! who is the man?"

"They call him Hernando de Leon."

The chief started as he uttered that name, and exclaimed quickly regaining his composure, "*I will do it!*"

Guzman muttered, with a smile, "I thought the weapon would do it."

The Indian did not seem to heed him, but said, briskly, "To-morrow the chief will demand the king's knife."

"It is here, chief, and yours when the man is dead, and it may be, if you are quick about it, I shall add something more. Now you may go."

The chief arose, and exclaimed — as a hideous smile played upon his stern features, which partook both of joy and of exultation — "By to-morrow morning that pale man shall be *safe!*"

"Thank you, good chieftain, let it be early," cried Guzman, and the chief vanished, but immediately returned and asked:

"Which of you is the cause of his death? Speak, that the Carib may know whom to thank for the knife."

"It is I, chieftain," said Guzman starting up.

The chief fixed his eyes upon his face for a moment, and then, with a writhing smile upon his features, bade him good day.

"I do not like that savage's features," said Guzman; "he appeared to treat my noble offer with a kind of contempt, methought."

"Pooh!" answered the bravo, "it is natural with the head chief — they pretend to despise *that* which above all things they worship; but he is the bravest man in the nation, and gained his station by his indomitable spirit; I sought him because I knew that he would accomplish the business without any quailing: his single word is worth a white man's oath — but who comes here? By heaven! it is that villain Hernando, as certainly as I breathe; you grow pale — are you sick? let me get you a glass of water, or a glass of —"

"Only a slight faintness come over me — I will seek the cool air."

Don Guzman slipped out at the back door, and stood trembling in the passage, but the person who entered proved only a brother officer who had called to kill the time which hung heavily on his hands.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATHER'S RETURN.

At the very time the scene we have described in the last chapter was transpiring, a vessel from old Spain put into the principal harbor of Hispaniola, and in it came Don Juan Rodriques, the father

of Guarica, who had been absent as we have said, for months in Old Spain.

For the first time in her life, Guarica had something to conceal, and this filled her heart with apprehension when her father appeared suddenly in his forest home. She remembered how earnestly he had befriended Don Guzman, who had so often accompanied him to their wild wood home; and a vague fear that she had done wrong in listening to words from another, which she had repelled in him, took possession of her. What if it were all true, and her father had indeed promised her in marriage to this man? Guzman had no idea of secrecy, and in the frankness of his profound innocence, told his father every thing, — that a strange and most noble man had found out their home while hunting in the woods, and had since then spent a portion of almost each day reading books and playing on the lute with Guarica, whose eyes always grew bright when he came, and who was always talking of his bravery in saving her from the fury of his hounds.

Rodrigues heard all this with sullen reserve, and before many days, he rode to the fort and learned that black phase of the story which Don Guzman had reserved for his ear. With true Spanish reserve he said nothing to his daughter, for it was his nature to act rather than threaten or persuade. For years it had been his will that Don Guzman should be the husband of Guarica, and the very thought of opposition made the proud blood burn like fire in his heart. He sat awhile after Guzman had related his grievances, with a swarthy red burning on his forehead.

“And you saw her alone in the arbor with this young man, saw her with your own eyes?”

“I have seen her three times, and she received him as only a maiden should welcome her betrothed.”

“Tell me all, did he touch her hand?”

“Ay, by my faith, and kiss it too with loud hot kisses, that made me sick with rage.”

“And she did not rebuke him?”

“Rebuke him! no, by my knighthood, she gave him the other hand.”

“Shameless!” cried the proud father, rising from his seat, and treading the stone floor till his very spurs clanked out his anger, “and she has been chary of such favors to thee, her chosen husband.”

“Nay, if I but touch the hem of her robe she shrinks away, and turns away, as with deadly loathing.”

“And you saw this without striking the man from chin to heel? I marvel at it.”

Don Rodrigues clenched his hand, and ground his white teeth behind his beard.

“By our Lady, I will bind that young bird safe before another week endangers the honor of my name! This comes of her savage

blood, which no power or art can tame. Remember, Don Guzman, my pledge is given, and the girl is yours. For this young sparrow-hawk, I will find jesses that shall fetter him effectually!"

"But that the fends were against me, I had done that already," muttered Guzman.

"How?"

"Only that I might easily have sent him out of the way had I cared to do it," said Guzman, with a forced laugh.

"That were inadequate and ignoble revenge. He who would disgrace Rodriques, must himself be disgraced."

"But there is a sure fate on his track even now."

"Again, how!"

"A Carib, whom he has angered, is on his track, and may have avenged us with a single blow, before we meet again."

"Let him wait, revenge should never be taken greedily, or swallowed at a single morsel."

But Guarica; while this man lives she will never be mine."

"Her father says she *shall* be thine."

"But while he lives, it will be like holding a falcon by the jesses," said Guzman, coloring under Rodriques' stern gaze.

"This looks like fear, Don Guzman."

"Fear! and to me? Nay, if I have not called the man to a prompt reckoning on the moment of his offence, it was that I feared to carry brawls and tumults into the dwelling of Don Rodriques' in his absence. It was only for this reason I let him come and go unquestioned."

"It was well, and I thank you," said Rodriques, yielding to the subtle compliment. "Be prepared for thy prompt espousals, there shall be no time for greater mischief, now that I have come. When Guarica is thy bride, this youth shall have full chastisement at thy hands, till then, I will deal with him."

"Better leave him to the Carib," said Guzman, with an uneasy laugh.

"Nay, the Rodriques seeks no savage aid to right his house; — but now young friend, I will take leave, for these matters must be thought over cautiously; when my mind is made up, you shall hear from me again. — meantime, be silent, it is only fools who gossip of their wrongs."

"Nay, I have been silent, and cautious from the first."

The old don smiled a grim smile that Guzman did not quite like but he grasped his hand cordially on going forth, and Guzman was left to a rather uncomfortable solitude.

"No," he said, muttering to himself, "revenge is pleasanter bought than taken; with many thanks to my future father-in-law; I may as well trust my Carib friend. I saw that poor wretch in Hernando's grasp on the cliff, it must have been very uncomfortable. No, no, revenge is best paid for, I want no hawks hovering around the birdie when she is mine. What, ho! without there!"

The man who had guided Hernando so near to the Cypress Swamp answered this rough call.

"Oh, it is you; well, who waits?"

"No one, senior, the person you expected has not returned, but I saw him on the edge of the forest to-day, talking with Don Hernando de Leon."

"Ah, did you so? then it is all well; I can wait, good Sebastian, I can wait, so the thing is done at last."

The man retired, well pleased to know that his own prowess was not to be brought again into active service. The lesson he had received on the precipice which overhung the Cypress Swamp, was yet fresh in his memory, and he had no ambition for a renewal of the service. Once or twice, since that day, he had met Don Hernando, who passed him with far less notice than he gave to one of the hounds that followed him to the chase and, to say the truth, the fellow had shame enough not to desire a second encounter, or a second glance of those scornful eyes.

For a marvel, he had spoken truth, when he said that Hernando and the Indian had conversed together on the edge of the forest, for the chief had waited for him there for hours, and was too impatient of delay to follow his usual cautious practice, and follow him unseen until they got out of sight of the settlement. This was what passed between them.

"My white brother is in danger of his life," were the first words the chief uttered when they had walked some distance.

"Ah! what is going on now?" said Hernando.

"The great wolf of the wilderness when he is famishing does not crave blood so much as that Spaniard — he dies — I have said it."

"Would the panther of the woods stoop to kill a fox — he is beneath the notice of my bold brother." The savage shook his head.

"I have said it — go and ask the wolf when he is starving not to kill the lamb, or the eagle to drop the prey from his claws, but not ask the Carib to change his words." Hernando knew that it was impossible to prevail upon the savage to revoke his words, but with a spirit more humane than politic, he said —

"He is so frightened at the approach of death that I pity him."

"He is unworthy to live," said the chief, with an expression of mingled contempt and hatred. "He is a scorpion, of no use, yet is full of poison, the sooner he dies the better."

"Not so my brother. I pray you spare this man. I had him in my power and let him go free, believe me I have no fear."

"But there is another one who wears gold on his bosom and plumes in his cap, and rides a horse that goes like the wind. He offered me a king's knife to kill you with."

"Ay, I knew it must be so, yet I have not one known enemy on earth; tell me, Arometa, my brother, what is the name of this man?"

"Arometa cannot tell the name, for no one ever spoke it before him."

“And the description is that of so many cavaliers; well, we can wait, one has pleasanter pursuits than searching for enemies. Good morning, Arometa.”

Two days went by, and still no word of all the evil passions bearing on her destiny reached Guarica, or really disturbed her lover who had not yet seen Don Rodriques, for he was ever away from home.

In the mean time, Don Guzman, between his cowardice and his wild passion for Guarica, became impatient for the Carib chief to do his work. It was wormwood for him to see his rival ride forth so bravely each morning on his way to that garden bower, which he had not the courage to enter, for he possessed the bravery of an assassin, not that of a cavalier, and when the Indian delayed to work out his vile purposes, he at last grew desperate, and bethought himself of a safer way by which his revenge might be accomplished.

Again he saw Don Rodriques, and with the aid of his creature, Sebastian, gave him such proof of the treasonable purposes of the young cavalier in his visits to his Carib children, that the proud Spaniard took another, and what he deemed honorable course to avenge the young cavalier's intrusion on the privacy of his family.

After one of these conversations with Guzman, he went at once to the governor of the fort, and, from that interview, sprang events that for a time filled the Spanish community with wonder and excitement.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHASE OF THE ASSASSIN.

AMID all the turmoil of evil passion young Love hovered like a cherub around that garden lawn. Guarica had almost forgotten that the insolent love of Don Guzman had been forced upon her. He had disturbed her more than once, but with that arch tact, which is so charming in the sex; she had evaded his protestations and put him quite out of her life — and now that her father had returned without reproaching her, all seemed well.

Thus, since the lovers first met, days, weeks, and months had run their course; yet, there was only that change in their feelings, which marks the first unfolding of the bud, and the full rich bloom of the flowers. There was no change in the deep azure of the glowing skies — no alteration in the green luxuriance of the forest — no falling of the woods “into the sore — the yellow leaf” — no fast succeeding variation from the young floweriness of springtide, to the deep flush

of gorgeous summer, or thence to the mature but melancholy autumn — to the grim tyrant, winter.

In that delicious island, nature had lavished on the earth, in her most generous mood, the mingled attributes of every clime and region. The tender greenery of the young budding leaf was blent at one and the same moment — and that moment, as it seemed, eternal — with the broad verdant foliage, the smiling bud, the odoriferous and full-blown flower, the rich fruit might be seen side by side on the same tree — the same bough. Nothing was there to mark the flight of time — the gradual advance of the destroyer over that lovely land. Nothing to warn the charmed spectator that, for him, too, as for the glowing landscape, maturity but leads to decay — decay which ends in death! Verily, but it is a paradise for the unthinking. Heaven and earth seemed to join lovingly in making the sweet May of love, **a paradise for those young hearts.**

Indeed, no earthly beings could be more happy than the young Spaniard and his half Indian love. Morn after morn beheld Hernando de Leon, threading the pathless forest — now with horse, horn, and hound, sweeping the tangled thickets, now skirring in pursuit of his fleet falcon, over the watery *cegas*, and now, with keen, observant eye, and cat-like pace, wandering, arbalest in hand, in silent search after the timid deer — but still in one direction, and still with one intent, to join the fair Guarica!

Day after day they loitered, side by side, among the cool shades of the mighty woods, while the fierce sun was scourging the clear champaign with intolerable heat; or sat reclined by the cold head of some streamlet, fatter, to them, of inspiration and of love, than were those fabled founts of Gálvez, whence Eres rose of yore, twin-born with the dark Anteros, to greet the eyes of Iamblichus.

The powerful mind of the young soldier had been cultivated, from his earliest youth, to skill, in all those liberal arts and high accomplishments, by which the gallant cavaliers of Spain had gained such honorable eminence above the ruler aristocracy of every other land — to his hands, no less familiar were the lute and gittern than the Toledo or the lance; to his well-tutored voice, the high heroic ballads of his native land, the plaintive elegies of Moorish Spain, the wild musical *arroyos* of the Indian tongue were equally adapted — nor did its accents sound less joyously in the clear hunting holloa, less fearfully in the shrill war-shout, than it was oft attuned to the peaceful cadences of a lady's lute — his foot firm in the stirrup, whether in the warlike tilt, in the swift race, or in the perilous leap, was no less graceful in the rapid dance, or agile in the wrestler's struggle on the green-sward.

Hernando was in short, a gentleman of singular accomplishments, of a mind well and deeply trained, skrewed, polished, courteous, yet keen and energetic within, and brave as his own trusty weapon. Like every dweller of a mountain land, he possessed that high and romantic adoration of the charms of nature, that exquisite apprecia-

tion of the picturesque and beautiful — whether embodied in the mute creations of wood and wild and water, or in the animated dwellers of earth's surface — which, in the breasts of others, is rather an acquired taste, nurtured by delicate and liberal education, than an intuitive and innate sense.

Handsome, moreover, eloquent and young, it would have been no great marvel had the brightest lady of the proudest European court selected Don Hernando as the ennobled object of a fresh heart's holiest aspirations. What wonder, then, that the untutored Indian girl — princess although she was, revered almost to adoration by her own simple people, secluded, from her earliest childhood, from all contact of mean or low association, removed from any contact with the debasing influences of the corrupt and contaminating world, secured from any need of groveling and sordid labor, voluptuous and luxurious as the soft climate of her native isle, yet pure as the bright skies that overhang it — romantic and poetical, as it would seem, by necessity arising from her lonely musings, — what wonder that Guernica should have surrendered, almost on the instant — to one who seemed to her artless fancy, not merely one of a superior mortal race, but as a god in wisdom, worth, and beauty — a heart which had been sought in vain by the most valiant and most proud of her nation's young nobility.

His grace, his delicate and courteous bearing, — so different from the coarse wooing of her Carib lovers, who seemed to fancy that they were conferring, rather than imploring an honor, when they sought her hand, or the more crafty advances of her father's people, — his eloquent and glowing conversation — these would alone have been sufficient to secure the wondering admiration of the forest maiden; but when to these were added the claim which he now possessed to her gratitude, by the swift aid which he had borne to her when in extremity of peril, and the respectful earnestness of pure and self-denying love which he displayed toward her, it would, in truth, have been well nigh miraculous, had she resisted the impression of her youthful fancy.

Nor were these unions between the dusky maidens of the west, and the hidalgos of Old Spain, by any means unfrequent or surprising among the earliest of those bold adventurers who had been sharers — in his first and second voyages — of the great toils and mighty perils which had been undergone by that wise navigator, who, in the quaint parlance of the day, gave a new world to Leon and Castile.

On the contrary, it was rather the policy of that great and good discoverer, who, in almost all his dealings with the rude natives, showed higher sentiments of justice and of honor than could have been expected from the fierce and turbulent age in which he lived — to encourage such permanent and indissoluble alliances between the best and bravest of his own followers and the daughters of the caciques and nobles of the land, as would assuredly tend, more than any other means, to bind, in real amity, the jarring races brought into close and intimate contact by his discoveries and conquests.

There was therefore not any thing to deter Guarieta from lavishing her heart's gem on the handsome cavalier who had so singularly introduced himself to her favor, and who, so eagerly — nay, devotedly — followed up that chance-formed acquaintance. Besides, Guarieta was half Spanish, and a princess in regard of the living savage blood, that gave her the loveliest type of beauty, and her intellect had received such culture, that Queen Isabella herself need not have scorned the maiden for a companion.

For several months, despite the ancient adage, the course of true love did, in their case, run smooth. No day, however stormy — for heavy falls of rain, accompanied by sullen gusts of wind, with thunder-claps, and the broad fearful lightning of the tropics, were, by no means, infrequent — prevented the adventurous lover from threading the tangled brake, scaling the steep precipitous ascent, fording the swollen river, straight as the bird flies to his distant nest. No turn of duty hindered him — the task performed — from hurrying through the hot glare of noon, or through the moonless night, to visit his beloved.

At first, his well-known ardor in the chase, accounted to his comrades for his protracted and continual absences from their assemblies, whether convened for woodland sports, or wild adventure — but when it was observed that, though he never went abroad save with the hawk and hound, or arbalest and bird-bolts, he brooked, no longer, any comrade in his sportive labors — that, though renowned above all his compeers for skill and courage in the mimicry of war, he often now returned, jaded, indeed, and overspent with toil, but either altogether empty-handed, or, at least, so ill-provided with the objects of his unwearying pursuit, that it was utterly impossible to suppose that a hunter, so renowned, could have, indeed, spent so much toil and time, all to so little purpose.

“This, for a short space, the point of many a light jest, many a merry surmise, gradually grew to be the subject of grave wonder and deliberation; for it was now remarked by all, even by his superiors, that Hernando — who, of yore, had been the keenest volunteer to offer — nay, to urge his services, when any foray was proposed against the daring tribe of Cacambo, the bold cacique of the Caribs, who now alone, of the five hereditary monarchs, who held sway in Hispaniola, dared to wage war against the white invader of his native fastnesses — no longer sought to be employed on such excursions — nay! that he even had refused, as it appeared to those who had solicited his aid, on slight and feigned excuses, to join their perilous excursions.

Whispers increased among his comrades, and, ere long, grew to be dark murmurs — rumor said that no hunter ever saw the firm of Don Hernando basking his fiery Andalusian, or heard the furious bay of his stanch blood-hounds in any of those haunts where strayed most frequently, and in the greatest plenty, the quarry which he feigned to chase — fame said — and for once truly, that though the

best scouts of the Spaniards had been urged, by curiosity, to play the spy upon his movements, their utmost skill had availed nothing! that whether in broad day, or in the noon of night, they never could keep him in view beyond the margin of one belt of forest land; or track the foot-prints of his charger — although the soil was deep and loamy — into its dark recesses! that, in whatever course he turned his horse's head, or bent his footsteps, on departing from the fortress of his friends he ever reached, by devious turns and secret by-paths, that same almost impenetrable thicket, and there vanished. It was an age of credulous fear — of dark, fatal superstition. He, who a few short months before had been the idol of his countrymen, the soul of their convivial meetings, the foremost and the blithest in their bold hunting-matches, the best lance in their forays, was now the object of distrust, of doubt, of actual fear, and almost actual hatred.

Some said that he had cast by his allegiance to his country and his king — that he had wedded with an Indian girl, and joined himself to her people, heart and hand — that he kept up this hollow show of amity with his betrayed, forsaken countrymen, only that he might gain some sure and fatal opportunity of yielding them, at once, to the implacable resentment of the Carib Caonabo.

Others, more credulous still, averred, in secret, that he had leagued himself — more desperately yet, and yet more guiltily — with creatures of another world! — that mystic sounds, and voices, not as of human beings, had been heard by the neighbors of his barrack-chamber! and one — he who had scouted him the farthest and most closely — swore that, on more than one occasion, he had beheld a grim and dusky form rise suddenly, as if from out the earth, and join him in the wildest of those woodlands, through which he loved to wander.

Thus did the time pass onward — Hernando and Guarica becoming, every day, more fond and more confiding, and, if that could be, more insupportable — and at the same time, suspicion, enmity, distrust, becoming more and more apparent at every hour, between him and his Spanish kinsmen.

“It will be but a little while,” he said, one lovely evening as they sat by the verge of their favorite streamlet, with the cold round moon soaring slowly through the immeasurable azure, and the leaves rustling gently on the rich foliage, “it will be but a little while, beloved, before the good and great Columbus will return, and then, then, sweet one, there shall be an end to all your doubts, anxieties, and fears. He is the best, the noblest, the most just of men — he is my friend, too, and a tried one. He once returned — I will avow to him my love for my Guarica; his consent it is meet that we should have, before our union — and of it, I am certain! Then — then, thou shalt be mine forever — mine in the sight of Heaven and all its angels!”

“But my father, he has returned — what if he frown upon all this?” said Guarica.

"Nay, he shall not. I, like himself, am of good lineage — and may speedily expect preferment from the queen — have no fear."

But Guarica was thinking of Don Guzman, the unwelcome suitor, whom she had never found courage to mention to her lover.

"Why so sad, my Guarica? Do you not love me?" said Hernando, remarking her sadness.

"My own Hernando!" was her sole answer — for her heart swelled as she spoke, and her soul was too full for words, and two large diamond tears collected slowly on the long silky fringes of her eyelids, and hanging there like dew-drops on the violet's petals, slid slowly down her soft cheeks.

"Tears — tears, Guarica?" cried the lover, half-reproachfully — "and wherefore? Can it be — can it be that thou doubtest me? — me, who never asked the slightest freedom — never assayed the smallest and most innocent familiarity — me, who would rather die — die, not on earth only, but for all eternity — than call up one chaste blush upon those maiden cheeks — than wake one doubt in that pure heart — than print one stain upon the whiteness of that virgin mind! Can it be?" —

"No! no!" exclaimed the girl, panting with eagerness to interrupt him, for he had spoken, hitherto, with such impetuous haste, that she had vainly sought to answer him. "No! no! Sooner could I doubt Heaven than thee, Hernando. They were tears not of sorrow, nor of doubt — but of pure joy! I know thou art the very soul of honor — I know thou wouldst ask nothing of thy Guarica, that it would not be her pride, her joy, her duty, to bestow. It was but joy, dear, dear Hernando, to think that we so soon should be united, beyond the power of man to part us."

Even as she spoke, while her cheek almost touched the face of her young lover, for, in the intense excitement of the moment, she had leaned forward, clasping Hernando's hand in both her own, a sharp, keen twang, mixed with a clash as if of steel, was heard behind them — a long dark streak seemed to glance through the narrow space between their heads with a loud whizzing sound, and on the instant a bolt or arrow stood quivering, buried almost to the feather, in the stem of a palm-tree opposite.

To spring upon his feet, to whirl his long two-edged toledo from the scabbard — to dash, with a loud shout, into the thicket, calling upon his trusty hounds, which, quite unconscious of the vicinity of any peril, were slumbering at Guarica's feet, to whom they had become familiar guardians — was but an instant's work to the young and fiery *hidalgo*. For, at the least, ten minutes' space he was absent from the Indian maiden, who, trembling with apprehension for the safety of him whom she had learned to love far more than life itself, with every tinge of color banished by mortal terror from her features, awaited his return.

With every sense on the alert, eye, ear, and spirit, on the watch, she stood in terrible excitement. She heard him crashing through

the tangled brake, she heard his loud voice cheering the eager bloodhounds to track out the footsteps of his hidden felon, but no lay of the sagacious animals, no clash of steel, or answering defiance fell on her anxious ear. His search was vain — his anxious labor fruitless — no fraying of the interlaced and thorny branches showed where the dastardly assassin had forced a passage for his retreating footsteps — no print in the clayey soil revealed where he had trodden — and, stranger yet, the keen scent of the sagacious dogs detected not the slightest taint upon the earth, or on the dewy herbage, although they queried to and fro, three hundred yards, at least, in circuit, around the tree wherein the well-aimed arrow stood — **meek evidence of the murderer's intent.**

Hernando returned, balked and disappointed, to Gaurica, big drops of icy perspiration standing on his high, clear forehead, and his whole frame trembling with the agitation of strong excitement.

“By my patron saint,” he exclaimed, as he returned to her, “this is most marvelous! there is not, nor hath been, within two hundred yards of us, a human being since we have sat here — if I may trust on mine own eyes, or, what is truer far, the scent of my good hounds! Yet here,” he added, as he tore, from the stem of the tall palm-tree, the short massive bolt, with its four-cornered barbed steel head, “here is the evidence that one — and that, too, a Spaniard — hath been, or now is close beside us. Come, dearest, come, let us leave **this perilous spot. By Heaven! but it is strange!**”

In silence — for the girl was too full of terror — the cavalier of dark and anxious thought, to enter into any converse — he led her homeward. Across the bright savannah gleaming in the moonlight, they reached rapidly the portico of her loved home — and there, after a tender parting, Hernando vaulted into the saddle of his fiery Andalusian — whistled his faithful bloodhounds to his heel, and dashed away, at a furious gallop, toward the fortress of his unfriendly countrymen.

Lager still to discover, if so it might be, something of him who had so ruthlessly aimed the murderer's shaft that night, Hernando rode directly to the spot where he had sat with Gaurica when the fell missile was discharged — he saw the grass betraying, by its bruised and prostrate blades, the very spot on which they had been sitting — but all was still and lonely. Onward he went across the very ground which he had searched so carefully, scarce half an hour before, and ere he had traversed fifty paces, both bloodhounds challenged **fiercely.**

Calling them instantly to heel, the cavalier alighted, bound his war-horse to a tree, and eagerly scanned the soil. At the first glance, deep printed in the yielding mold, he found the clear print of a Spanish buskin, furnished with a long knightly spur. To follow the trace backward was his first impulse, and scarce three minutes were consumed, before he had tracked it to a tall and shadowy oak, the bark of which, scarred and defaced, showed that some person had not long before both climbed it and descended.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, striking his breast with his clenched hand! "Ha! idiot that I was, who thought not of this. It matters not, however, for right soon will I have him! Forward, good hounds," he added, "forward, hark! Hailon, ho! Hark, forward!" and the vexed woodhounds rang to the tremendous baying of the deep-mouthed dogs, and the hard gallop of the hunter. They reached the open ground, a league of forest having been already passed, and the hounds, for a moment, were at fault.

Springing again to earth, Hernando easily discovered by the prints in the soil, that here the fugitive had taken horse, having, it would seem, left his charger under the keeping of a menial, while prosecuting his foul enterprise. For, henceforth, two broad horse-tracks might be seen running distinctly over the bare savannah, homeward.

Laying the hounds upon the horse-track, the cavalier again remounted, and the fresh dew aiding the scent, away they drove at a pace almost unexampled, through brake and bush, over the open plain, athwart the murky covert — hill and hollow vanished beneath their fiery speed — rock and tree glanced by and disappened, so furious was their pace — the deepest torrent barred him not, nor the most perilous leap deterred him — for the most fiery, the most constant, the most pervading of all human passions — deadly revenge was burning his heart's core, turning the healthful currents of his blood to streams of fiery lava.

The dearest hour of night had long been passed already, when he dashed forth upon that desperate race — the pale, cold light of morning was streaming, broad but still, over the palisaded ditch and mounted ramparts of the Spanish fortress, when Don Hernando de Leon pulled up his foaming steel before the drawbridge.

Early, however, and untimely as was the hour, men were abroad already — a mounted servitor, in liveries of Isabel and silver, riding a coal black jennet, and leading, by the bridle-rein, a tall bay charger, trappet and housel richly with the same colors, was retiring from the gates, which were fast closing, toward the barrack-stables.

Toward this steel jaded and spent with toil, and all embossed with sweat and foam-flakes and galled and bleeding at the flanks from cruel and incessant spurring, the savage bloodhounds, still in full cry, dashed, without stint or check, and would have pulled the bay horse down, had not the stern voice of their master checked them. He rode up to the groom, and in a deep voice, calm, slow and perfectly unmoved, demanded:

"Whose charger?"

Without reply, the servitor was hastening away, when he asked once again, in fiercer tones, drawing his dagger as he spoke.

"Whose charger, dog? Speak, or thou diest! Whose charger, and who hath now dismounted from him? Not that I need thy voice to tell me what I already know, but that I choose to hear my knowledge confirmed by human words. Whose charger?"

"Don Gazman de Herrerior's," replied the faltering menial "He hath even now gone in — the bridge is not yet lifted."

“Excellent well!” replied the cavalier — “excellent well mine ancient comrade — excellent well! my fellow-soldier, whose life I have thrice saved — once from the Moors, amid the mountain glens of Malaga — once from the seris, among the dread Antilles — and once here in this isle of Hispaniola, from the envenomed arrow of the Carib. Excellent well, Don Guzman!”

In the mean time, dismounting at the gates, he gave his charger and his horse to the care of a favorite domestic, who awaited him; and with a firm, slow step, crossing the draw-bridge, stopped, for a moment, to address the sentinel.

“So!” he said, “old Gasper — thou keepest good watch — when went Don Guzman forth?”

“After we set the watch yesternone, fair sir!” replied the old Castilian, presenting, as he spoke, his partizan. “Now I bethink me, it was scarce five minutes after *thou* didst ride forth into the forest!”

“And he hath now returned?”

“But now!”

No further words were interchanged — the young knight slowly passed across the court-yard, entered the vaulted passage which led toward the chambers of Don Guzman — paused at the door, and without one word, struck on the panel one strong blow — a stern voice from within cried, “Enter!” and he did enter, and closed the door behind him, and locked and double-locked it, and though strange sounds were heard, and fearful voices, above three hours passed ere any one came forth!

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRISONER.

THE whole of the day, on which Hernando de Leon returned from his nocturnal chase, passed gloomily — no eye of sentinel or warrior beheld Don Guzman de Herreire, nor was he present at the hall wherein his comrades feasted.

Hernando, on the contrary, far from his wonted temper, was there, the gayest of the gay — his repartee the keenest, yet most polished; his laugh the merriest; his song the most entrancing. Men who had known him for long years; who had fought by his side in the wild forays with the Saracens of bright Granada, and in the scarcer less desperate encounters of the timeless Caribs — men who had borne all perils of the sea, the wilderness, and, worse than all, the lazaret-house with him — men who had feasted at the jovial board,

and drained the wassail cup, for years, with him — *now* marveled! They felt as though there were something in his manner which they had never known before — a melancholy in the merriment, yet mingled with a recklessness, which baffled their sagacity — a deep, romantic sentiment — an all-pervading tone of profound thought in his lightest converse — blent with an air of strange abstraction — a breaking off from graver subjects, and plunging into bursts of wild and furious mirth — and then again, a softening of the mirth into the sweetest and the saddest touches of imagination that poet ever dreamed or minstrel sung.

Thus passed the evening meal; and when the courtes parted, the souls of many who had felt estranged, they scarce knew why, from the young cavalier, yearned to partake again his high and generous friendship — they grasped his hand more warmly than they had done for months, although their present kindness was in no less degree unmeaning, than had been their suspicion and distrust.

Gayly they parted; with many merry comments on the unwonted absence of Don Guzman, and many a jocular conjecture as to the cause of his feigned illness — for, when the trumpets had rung forth their gladsome peal of invitation to the festive board, the senechal had borne to the presiding officer his courteous greetings, and regrets that he was ill at ease, and might not, for that day, participate in their accustomed revelries.

As Don Hernando was retiring to his chamber, an old veteran, one of those retainers of a noble house who sometimes form all the real nobility that is left to it, came respectfully toward him and placed a small roll of vellum in his hand. Hernando tore the silken cord that bound it, and unrolling the missive, read it by the light of a silver sconce that burned against the wall. It was a note from Don Guzman, and after the usual formalities, contained the following :

“ You have challenged me to mortal combat. I claim the privilege of the challenged party as to time and place. Being ill in bodily health, I must claim the delay of three days; then I will meet you at any place you may appoint, so that it be away from the fort.

GUZMAN DE HERREIRO.”

Hernando read the cartel with a flushed brow and compressed lip. “ Is the man a coward ? ” he muttered; “ well, it will be a long three days to wait; but — ” remembering all at once that the bearer of the note stood by, he spoke aloud: “ Tell Don Guzman de Herreiro that I am at his service, and shall wait his pleasure. To-morrow his cartel shall be answered in form.”

The man bent low and retired without a word. Hernando was ill at ease and had no desire to go to sleep, so he went forth into the night, and, thoughtless of the danger, walked toward the forest. As he moved, a shadow seemed following him. It was the Carib chief who kept a silent guard over him.

"How strange is that man's character," mused Hernando, "because my father by mere chance saved *his* life, he stands ready to take away the life of his fellow-beings, in order to express his gratitude to the son of that man, for a deed that transpired when that son was a mere child! And the tenacity with which he clings to a resolution! A white man may make a thousand idle promises, and they are forgotten, but an Indian attaches the greatest importance to every word which he utters, for he uses few words in conveying his thoughts, and does not take the trouble of thinking unless necessary — it is a strange nation, and none more strange than my friend, the chief, who would probably still be my friend, even if I were his bitterest enemy."

With such thoughts as these, Hernando walked leisurely toward the town; it was a bright moonlight evening; he stood upon the hill overlooking the town, and stopped to gaze upon it; all had sunk to silence, for the inhabitants had retired to rest, and the stillness had something solemn in it. So he still felt inclined to tarry a moment, and look upon the beautiful spot beneath him. "Upon that spot," he exclaimed, looking toward the home of Rodriguez, "are centered all my hopes and, perhaps, all my despair — that one spot contains all which I wish to possess on earth, and still beautiful and valuable as it is, *she* is a diamond in the midst of it."

A sudden cry attracted his attention, and a number of Spanish soldiers rushed upon him; he had no arms, but with his large knife he kept them at bay, although they were armed with guns and pistols.

"Charge, men; what! are you sleeping? or afraid of a single arm? Shame! charge upon him; but save his life."

The soldiers, ashamed of being dismounted by one man, rushed upon Hernando, but instantly a figure leaped from the undergrowth and the foremost and rashest soldier fell; another flash of the knife and a second uttered his death-cry. More lives would have been the cost of that hour's work, but Hernando dashed the Carib's knife aside, and besought him to flee, for, whatever the pretence might be, these were officers and soldiers from the fort, and resistance was treason.

As he spoke, the savage drew slowly back and disappeared crest-fallen and rebuked, like a faithful dog who feels that he has been over-
edificious. Without waiting to demand the reason of his arrest, the young knight went with his captors to the fort.

The officer who had command of the soldiers conducted him to a room partially under ground, where persons under arrest were usually confined; there he was left for the night, having no idea of the reason of his imprisonment, and only understanding with vague indignation that his enemy Don Guzman was at the bottom of it all.

When morning came, the door of Hernando's cell was opened, and a file of soldiers stood ready to conduct him forth to the court-martial which had been promptly convened. For in a new settlement like that of Hispaniola, the Spaniards found their only sure protection in military law, which then as now is fearfully prompt in its award of death or freedom.

The officer on guard gave him a brief intimation of the trial he might expect, as they passed down the corridors of the fort, and when he entered the large stone hall, where the court was convened, he saw the imposing preparations made without surprise. The hall was guarded by a cordon of soldiers, through which he passed to a platform raised at the upper end. On this platform sat a band of superior officers dressed in full uniform, and, prominent among them, he saw the commander of Isabella, whose grave look was fixed upon him as he entered.

"My lord," said the prisoner, advancing to the platform with the high martial grace which was peculiar to him, — "my lord, why is it that a Spanish cavalier is waylaid on his evening ramble, and confined like a common felon over night, and then brought to your presence under guard as if guilty of some capital offence?"

The commander bent his head with grave courtesy, and replied, "Don Hernando de Leon, you are charged with a grave offence against your countrymen and against the laws which bind us together."

"What offence, your excellency, and who are my accusers?"

"You are charged with holding treasonable intercourse with our enemies, the Caribs, with designs against the settlement of Isabella, and with plotting against the lives of your fellow-officers and countrymen."

"It is a foul slander!" cried the young cavalier, drawing the glove from his hand, — "a black calumny, for which I hold the author accountable at the sword's point the moment this hand is free to wield good Spanish steel."

"Put up your gauntlet, Don Hernando de Leon," said the president, with a half smile; "a charge like this is not to be disposed of by single combat. It is treason against your sovereign and your countrymen."

Don Hernando bowed to the mild rebuke, and answered with profound respect, "I submit, your excellency. Now let my accuser come forward."

He looked around as he spoke, but instead of Don Gazman, whom he expected to see, a tall and elderly man came forward, whom he recognized at once as the father of Guarica. The color flashed to his forehead. Was this the way in which they were first to meet — as bitter enemies? The thought made his heart swell, and his lip quivered with sudden pain.

"Don Juan Rodriguez, have you brought witnesses to sustain the charge made against the cavalier De Leon, whom you see a prisoner before us?" said the governor.

Don Juan stepped close to the dais and answered in a clear, cold voice, that seemed coming through ice, "Your excellency, I have brought witnesses, and hold myself responsible to make good the charges that have been registered against this young man, whose face I have hardly seen to recognize before, and of whose history till now I am ignorant."

"I have witnesses to prove that during my absence from the island, this young man has intruded himself into my dwelling, where it is known to your excellency resides my only son, a Carib by the half blood and the rightful cacique of all the Indian tribes in this island—a prince whose destiny it may be to unite the natives of this country in perpetual amity with the cavaliers of Old Spain.

"He is the heir to a house which boasts the best blood of Castile in my own person, and, on his mother's side, is lord of all the Carib tribes now divided under his rule and that of his false kinsman Caonobo. I speak thus of my son's condition, not from vain boasting, but to reveal how the power vested in him was to be used to the destruction of Fort Isabella. Orazimbo is but now beginning to feel the first ardent impulses of manhood. I have reared him with great care leaving his savage nature to its brave instincts, that he may be strong to defend his own rights and control his mother's people—still subduing the gentle blood that mingles with its fiery might into such subordination as will make Orazimbo and the tribes that owe him obedience, the faithful allies of Christopher Columbus, and those brave Spaniards who have followed that great man's fortunes across the ocean.

"It was in this hopeful condition I left Orazimbo. The Carib tribes that have always scorned the rule of Caonobo, and owned Orazimbo as their chief, were friendly to the Spaniards, and of peaceable intent. During the boyhood of Orazimbo, Aroneta, a warrior of rank, second only to Caonobo, and who was one of the council of that audacious usurper till his ambition grew mutinous, has maintained my son's authority among a majority of the Carib tribes, while Caonobo, driven to the fastnesses of the mountains, held authority over the fiercest of the tribes by his prowess as a warrior alone.

"Through this warrior Aroneta, the prisoner has most cunningly brought a malign influence to bear on my son. It is known that Caonobo meditates an attack on Fort Isabella. The object of the prisoner was to induce Orazimbo to make his first battle by the side of his false uncle, and having once conquered the fort, and put its commander and officers to the sword, to unite in one body and proclaim himself—the prisoner—governor of Isabella. It was a wicked plot craftily carried out—so craftily that my son, who in his frank nature suspected no guile might have been influenced to accept this treason but for my unexpected return.

"This, my lord, is the charge which I bring against Don Hernando de Leon, the prisoner. Now I make room for the witness who overheard these treasonable overtures both to my son Orazimbo and his counselor Aroneta."

The governor bent his head as Don Juan stepped from before the dais and motioned to a man, who stood near the door to advance.

The witness came forward with a sort of brazen assurance, which spoke but ill for his honesty; he kept his eyes resolutely turned from

the prisoner who, with deep indignation, recognized Sebastian, the wretch whose life he had spared in the Cypress Swamp.

When called upon to speak, this man swore that he had been often at the residence of Don Juan Rodriguez, having ridden there frequently as an escort to the prisoner, but oftener still had taken messages to Arometa, a Carib chief, and letters to Orazimbo. That is, letters had been intrusted to him by the prisoner time and again, but after the first, he became suspicious from the strange caution of the prisoner, and opening these missives, found their contents so full of treasonable matter, that he resolved to take but never deliver them. After that many letters, still more boldly developing a fearful plot to unite all the Caribs, during the absence of Celualus, and take possession of Isabella, of which the prisoner was to be made commander, were placed in his hands for delivery, but after mastering their contents, he invariably destroyed them.

Here an officer of the court inquired if no one of those treasonable letters had been preserved.

No; the witness had feared to keep them a moment, lest he himself should be considered an accomplice; nor had he dared to mention them till since the return of Don Rodriguez. On being questioned closely, this man confirmed all he had been saying with many plausible trifles, which had their weight with the court. He swore positively to having read in De Leon's handwriting, a proposal for surprising the Spanish garrison and putting its officers to death. He also swore to a strange and most unnatural intimacy existing between the prisoner and an Indian by the name of Arometa, who had been several times within the very walls of the fortress in disguise, and who had been seen again and again plotting with him in the forest, where the prisoner went day after day with horse and hound, but never brought bird or deer back to Fort Isabella. In confirmation of this, the witness resought the court to question the soldiers who had seen their comrades fall dead beneath the blows of this very Carib on the night of De Leon's arrest.

After this man withdrew, other witnesses were brought forward, corroborating his evidence by many suspicious circumstances. Even the officers of the fort remembered their old suspicions of the prisoner and the rumors to which his strange conduct had given currency, and thus innocently joined with his accusers. Hernando himself was astonished at the array of evidence brought against him, for truth and falsehood had been interwoven with such crafty skill that it seemed impossible ever to disentangle the right from the wrong.

When the evidence was all in, Don Hernando was permitted to speak in his own behalf.

"I am charged," he said, "with plotting treason with a young chief, whose evidence, if it confirmed that already before the court, would prove my guilt beyond a question. Why is that young chief absent? I demand his examination. It is not even hinted that he listened to my alleged proposal, and there is no reason why he should not be examined."

The governor looked inquiringly at Don Rodriques.

"This is an oversight, senor," he said, "the principal witness should not have been wanting in a case of so much importance."

"Orazimbo is in the mountains; a messenger might search for him in vain," said Rodriques, frowning heavily; "but surely the evidence already before the court is sufficient to prove the blackest treason."

The governor bent his brow and answered nothing, save that the trial must be delayed till young Orazimbo could be found — a decision that filled Don Guzman with vindictive wrath when he heard it, for he knew that an acquittal must follow the appearance of Orazimbo if confronted with the man whose evidence he had so carefully prepared.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PAGE

DON HERNANDO, with more show of respect than he had yet received was escorted by the guard back to his prison, where he sat down to compose his thoughts. His every hope now lay in the appearance of Orazimbo; but how was the young chief to be found? In what way was he, a prisoner half-condemned, to find a messenger who would go in search of a man wandering at random in the forest? He thought of the Carib's pledge, which still lay in his bosom, but remembered that it would but prove more conclusive evidence of his intimacy with the Indians, should he be discovered in an attempt to forward it.

"Alas!" he exclaimed, taking the gorgeous belt from his bosom, and dashing it on the floor, where it lay coiled up and glittering like a serpent, dangerous to touch; "every thing is a delusion. I am in the toils, and shall be left to die there without one friend to help me. It is cruel, but they shall not see me cower before my fate. Oh, my poor Guirica, how she will be listening and waiting for me, and I here — shut up like a bird — well, be it so, I can bear any thing!"

With these bitter words he threw himself on the cold floor and closed his eyes, while a stern expression of despair settled on his face. All at once an idea flashed upon him. If his servant could get access to his dungeon for a single moment, he might be sent in search of Arometa. Fired by this new hope, he sprang to his feet, and knocked softly against the door.

"Well, what do you want?"

It was the sentinel speaking from without.

"Listen; could you not come in a moment?"

"My orders are strict — I can not do it."

Hernando drew a piece of gold from his pocket, and thrust it under the door. He heard the guard stoop and pick it up.

"I have more — will you listen?" whispered the prisoner.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I entreat you, come in a single moment."

The voice of the guard softened. "But I must obey orders."

"It is only for a moment."

"Well, well; speak to me through the key-hole; I am listening."

"My page — let me speak one word with Alonzo, my page."

"It is at the risk of my life."

"Truly; but you are prudent, and I have more gold."

"How much?"

"Ten broad pieces, and double that when the man is gone."

"Thrust them under the door."

"Let me hear the voice of my page, then the gold is yours."

He heard the guard set down his pike and hurry down the passage with a light tread; after a few minutes, that seemed hours to the prisoner, he returned, followed by a second person. There was a cautious turn of the lock, and the door opened enough to admit the high-spirited boy, whose eyes were still heavy with sorrowing over his master's misfortunes. As he entered, the guard thrust his hand through the opening.

"Come, count out the gold, and be quick," he said, in a frightened voice.

Hernando filled his palm with gold; then, turning to the page, bade him go down to the edge of the forest, near a great live oak, which he described, and tell the Indian he would find watching near its trunk, in what strait he was. Then, whispering low to the page, he said:

"Take with you an ample cloak with a sombrero, and let him present himself at my prison door as if it were yourself coming back; the guard will not be quick of sight."

"It is perilous business, but if caution and good will can do it, the Carib shall reach your cell before the midnight strikes."

"My life is in your hands. Go, and our Lady guide you," said the prisoner, gently; "she will if it is best that my poor life be saved."

The Carib chief, Arometa, had witnessed the captivity of his Spanish friend, with burning impatience to avenge or rescue him. But he was alone, and without the aid of Orazimbo — who had gone into the mountains to gather up his people to a first well-organized resistance against his faithless kinsman Caenobe, whose usurpation made the first manly blood burn in his veins — it was impossible for Arometa to attack the fort where Hernando was confined.

But with the warriors of his race, stratagem was often more effectual than force. Arometa remembered the base mission on which

the enemies of De Leon supposed him to be engaged, and he resolved to use it as a pretext for gaining admission to the fort.

The chief waited under the live oak, from under whose dense foliage he had so often watched for Hernando's coming forth, till it was quite dark. As he lay across its gnarled roots, a voice from out of the shadows called him by name.

Arometa started up with his hand on his knife, and came forward. A few whispered words with the page, and a broad Spanish sombrero shaded his swart face, and his stately figure was disguised in a voluminous cloak.

"Nay, this is wonderful. You will pass without question," whispered the page.

"Arometa will enter with his forehead to the light," answered the Indian, with a laugh. "He has many friends yonder. Had my brother waited, he would have found the Carib searching for his belt."

With these words the warrior strode away toward the fort, braving the moonlight with careless intrepidity, while Alonzo returned more cautiously, gliding through the shadows like a night-bird.

Don Guzman and Rodriguez sat alone in the young cavalier's chamber, baffled and disappointed with the course things had taken in the court. Guzman had depended on a prompt trial and speedy execution, and had not once taken it into account that the evidence of Orazimbo would be required, that of a Carib never having been taken in a Spanish court before.

With the prejudice and of Sebastian, he had succeeded in convincing Don Rodriguez of the prisoner's guilt; but if that noble once came face to face with his son, the fraud must be discovered.

"Why are you so sad?" questioned the old Spaniard.

"Orazimbo loves his sister, and will not speak what he knows of this man's guilt. He may yet escape, and rob me of my bride," answered the young man, looking all the discontent he felt.

"Nay, we will not wait for this evil chance; every thing is ready. I will prepare Guarica, and on the day after to-morrow the marriage shall take place. When a Rodriguez pledges his word, fate itself shall not prevent the accomplishment."

The young cavalier arose with sparkling eyes, and taking the old noble's hand, pressed it to his lips.

"Oh, senor, this is generous. I am unworthy so much goodness. Only make the beautiful Guarica wing, and I have no wish left."

"The daughters of our house have no will that is not permitted them," answered Don Rodriguez, with a proud smile. "Depend on it, the day after to-morrow sees Guarica your bride."

With this good promise, Rodriguez left the chamber, and directly his train moved away along the passages of the fort.

CHAPTER X.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

With all his brilliant prospects, Don Guzman was ill at ease, he had practiced a double fraud, first, on the father of Guarica; again, on the court-martial, and there was peril in both. True, his rival was in prison, and his perjured witnesses firm, but what might to-morrow bring forth?

What if Orazimbo should appear? What if the governor, who seemed but too much in favor of the prisoner, should refuse to sign the verdict, if one of guilt was found, or should indeed pardon the offender after all else had failed? While there was a chance of escape, however remote, the high-born coward trembled and shrunk away from the future. What though Guarica became his bride, with that brave man alive, his bliss would forever be embittered with apprehension. The day of reckoning would surely come. Should he escape the snares of that trial, nothing but mortal combat or open disgrace to himself could be expected.

Where could the Carib chief be loitering? The people of his race were not wont to be laggard with a foe-man in sight. It was at this hour he had once before visited the fort; perhaps he would come again that night. Guzman found himself waiting impatiently for an interview with the Indian. He had not dared to propose the wicked deed he meditated to Don Rodriguez, who would have spurned the idea of assassination, but he was not the less resolved to save all future apprehension, by urging the Carib on to his murderous work.

Don Leon, once out of the way, he cared not how, and his path to happiness lay clear. In the field and in love, the young cavalier had been his most formidable rival; a caged lion might break loose — a dead one never.

As Don Guzman was dwelling on these baleful thoughts, the door of his chamber was flung open, and Arometa entered. The knight sprang to his feet, with ill-concealed triumph.

"Well, chief, we have trapped your prey," he said, with fierce exultation.

"Yes, Arometa saw the soldiers fall upon him."

"But without your help, he may escape."

"And you have him safe?"

"Ay, ay; while you were hunting for the wolf, we caught him in a trap."

“That is well ! where do they keep him tied ?”

“Sebastian will show you the way to his dungeon. But tell me, your tribe puts its enemies out of the way without noise ?”

“Ay,” said Arameta; “still and softly as the ripe leaf drops from its bough.”

Guzman drew his chair close to the Carib, and laid the richly inlaid poniard which we have seen before, in his hand. The Indian examined the workmanship with vivid admiration.

“You like the knife,” said Guzman, smiling till his mustache curled upward.

“Chonobo has not a knife like this,” said the chief, exulting in his prize.

The cavalier leaped toward him, and touched the weapon with his finger.

“When the blade is red, a pistolet of like value shall have a place beside it in your belt.”

The Carib smiled, a grim loud smile.

“The king’s knife will be paid for when the sun sets to-morrow,” he muttered, placing the poniard in his bosom, and folding the cloak over it.

“But why not to-night ?” said Guzman, in hot haste for his enemy’s blood.

“Does no one guard the door ?”

“Yes, but when the Carib kills his prey softly, he keeps the knife in his belt; but there is a root in the forest which he grinds to powder, and throws into a cup of wine, when it stands ready for an enemy to drink. Is there drink for the wolf you wish to see die ?”

Guzman’s eye brightened; this idea took away the only dread that had possessed him — that of a struggle in the prisoner’s dungeon, which might lead to detection.

“Is the root sure ?” he said, sinking his voice.

“Is the bite of a viper sure ?”

“And swift ?”

“Twelve hours of darkness — twelve hours of light, and your enemy sleeps softly, but grows very cold.”

“That will do, twelve hours of darkness — twelve hours of light ! On my bridal morning he will sleep and grow cold, the thought will give zest to my joy,” said Guzman, with a wicked smile.

The Carib smiled also; it was an unusual thing to see these grim lips so disturbed, and boded an evil fate to the man who came within their influence.

“Tell me where the wolf lies,” he said, glancing at the door; “and see that they give him plenty of drink. Arameta will be athirst, and find the cup for himself.”

“Stay, Sebastian must point out the door, and this pass will admit you, fortunately the captain of the guard reports to me.”

The Indian took the scrap of vellum on which the cavalier had written, and followed a man, whom a touch of the bell had summoned from a passage of the fortress.

About two hours after Hernando had been left to himself, the dungeon door opened, and the chief, whom he had been hoping for, came in. He shut the door, listened a minute, and then drew close to the prisoner.

"Brother!"

Hernando snatched the hand, which broke loose from the cumbersome drapery of the cloak, and wrung it hard.

"Speak quick, there is little time. What enemy shall I strike?"

"None, none. I must be honorably set free, or not at all."

"Take this, and this, and this," said the chief, throwing off his Spanish disguise, and drawing the costly poniard from his bosom.

"Arometa is cunning like the fox, they can not kill him?"

"No, my brother, no, I must not flee, that would stem a confession of guilt. One thing alone can save me."

"Well, Arometa is ready."

"To-morrow bring Orazimbo here, when the sun first touches the great live oak, and I am saved."

"Orazimbo has gone to the hills, his blood is hot against Caonabo, who jeers at his youth. He is gathering the tribes. Arometa had work here, or he would have gone too."

"Then you know his path? My steed is in the barrack stables, fleet and fresh -- mount and away. If the young chief comes to-morrow, before the dew is off the grass, it is well, if not, our Lady have mercy, for man will show me none."

"If Orazimbo comes, my brother is free?" questioned the chief, but half convinced that violence was not the secret means of escape.

"As the good steed that you will mount."

"Then the wind is not so swift as Arometa?"

The chief gathered his cloak about him, like some Roman hero, and prepared to leave the dungeon; but his eyes fell on the "golden belt" which still remained on the floor.

"It should die in my brother's bosom," he said, lifting it from the floor. "Arometa cannot read books, but he understands what this means, when it comes!"

"Forgive me?" pleaded the prisoner, pained by his own carelessness.

"The chief smiled. "When Arometa opens the door, my brother must lift you cup to his lips, and drink."

"I will," replied Hernando; lifting the tankard between his hands.

The chief flung the door wide open, and the sentinel, looking in, saw that the prisoner was drinking eagerly, one other person, who stood behind a pillar in the dark passage, saw him all and laughed inly.

As the Carib chief strode away, this man followed him.

"Is it safely done?" he questioned.

"Safe as death. Now let some one send to the stables -- Arometa is safest now in the hills."

"That is well. Ho! Sebastian, give this noble cavalier, Hernando

de Leon, a swiftest horse, by the road he has earned it well, put pistols in his saddle bow, and aught else that brave men affect. It were best indeed, chief, that you sought the hills at once, so farewell, and thanks — the cavalier will never want his horse again."

The recreant cavalier held out his hand, but before he had spoken half a dozen words, the chief was away, striding swiftly through the darkness.

Guzman stood and listened; all was still as death in the fortress; but directly he heard the measured beat of the horse dashing toward the forest. It lasted scarcely three minutes, so swift was the speed, but two men smiled when it passed away. The prisoner in his dungeon, and Don Guzman, as he stole back to the chamber he had left.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VERDICT.

ALL this time Guarica wandered sally around her blooming paradise, as Eve waited and sighed when Adam left her for his rustic work in Eden. She was all alone; Orazimbo had left home directly after his father's return, on some unknown mission to his people in the hills. Hernando, for whom she filled the vases in the bower, and carried out her choicest singing-birds, came no more to her sweet wishing. The fawns watched her restlessness, and after a few innocent caresses, went off to the thickets, wondering at her indifference to all their pretty wiles. Vague and unhappy feelings took possession of her; she felt that something dark and terrible threatened her future, and had no power to cast the impression off.

It took shape in the forms of her father and Don Guzman. She trembled as they came down the garden-path together, and calling to her fawns, prepared to flee from the bower.

But as her father saw her gliding through the thickets he called aloud, and bade her await his coming.

Don Guzman hung back, and amused himself with a gorgeous macaw, who pecked at him viciously from the branches of a magnificent musketo asuncena. He had not the courage to join Rodriguez in that painful interview with his daughter.

Rodriguez made but scant ceremony with his child; he told her in brief, as she stood pale and trembling before him, that on the morrow she must prepare to stand with Don Guzman at the altar. The bridal dresses were all prepared. Indeed the Queen of Spain had selected them for the bride of her favorite cavalier, and they had been just brought up from the ship.

A maiden of these times must have been brave indeed, had she dared to dispute the behest of her parent, even in the smallest matter. Guarcia had no words in which to express the revolt of her whole nature against this union. So she stood before her father, with pale cheek and quivering lip, like a criminal who dared not protest though crushed to the earth with an unjust sentence.

"Wilt thou not speak, child?" said the father, with a gleam of tenderness. "The cavalier has waited long for such smiles as a maid gives her betrothed, and there is little time for wooing; the wedding-day will be to-morrow."

"To-morrow — oh, my father, have pity! I can not, holy Virgin, I can not wed with that man. Give me a little time, or I shall die!"

"There is no need of time, for all eternity would not avail to change my purpose, Guarcia. To-morrow, at daylight, I trust the renegade, Don Hernando de Leon, will be shot in the fortress garden for treason. Before noon we shall have a grand carouse at your wedding, for you will then be the wife of the man of all others whom your father has chosen."

She did not hear him, but stood cold and rigid, like a marble statue, set mockingly among the flowers. Her eyes grew wild and opened wide, her pale lips fell apart till the teeth gleamed through with painful whiteness.

"Before the dew leaves the flowers in the morning, thou wilt don the bridal-dress, and see that it is of the richest; for henceforth my daughter must forget the savage blood of her mother, and honor the land to which her lord belongs. Among the eglers I have brought, from those polishing in Seville, are carunclets of pearls, with tiaras of diamonds and blood-red rubies. Set them close upon thy arms, thy neck, and in that rich hair, my daughter, for there is not a lady in her majesty's court, that goes to her lord dowered with greater wealth or more perfect beauty."

"Oh, father — father, spare me!"

That plaintive cry would have touched a heart of stone, it was so full of anguish.

"Tush, child; get within and prepare bravely for this bridal; it irks me that Orazzabo must perforce be absent, but he belongs to his tribes, and thou, my daughter, to a more gentle people."

He would not heed the anguish in that pale face, or the broken cries that died on her lips, but turned away and left Don Guzman to his wooing. Now Guarcia grew strong; her courage rose, her woman's nature revolted against that man who had come to claim, not woo her. She shuddered at his approach, as if a serpent had crept under the flowers and was coiling around her.

He had no courage to seize the opportunity which Don Rodriguez had given him; but after a few gallant compliments, to which she listened in freezing silence, he went in doors, telling her that he would not disturb the modest happiness of her thoughts, but looked for her rosiest smiles on the morrow.

So he left her for a little, and then Guarica went into her lower, and concealed by its drapery of flowing vines, fell on knees and prayed with deep, deep sobs and moans of utter hopelessness. Her lover in peril — Orazimbo gone — where on earth or in heaven was she to turn for help.

In the mean time, an unexpected scene was going forward at the fortress. Deep in the morning, but before the grave business of the day had commenced, a Carib warrior, evidently worn and travel-soiled with a long and rapid night's ride, boldly claimed audience of the commander of Fort Isabella.

A conversation of some length passed between those two strangely assorted persons, and then the governor came forth with a brighter face than he had worn for many a day. Directly orders were sent forth for the convening of the court so abruptly suspended the day before, when Don Hernando went forth in reality a condemned man, save in one instance, in the opinion of the officers who sat upon his trial.

By these prompt orders the court was convened. True, Don Rodriques and Guzman were absent, for they had not expected the court to convene that day. But as one had given in his evidence, and the other had made his personal quarrel a reason for not appearing at the court-martial at any time, this was no bar to the proceedings.

Exactly as the court had met on the previous day, it assembled now. Hernando came in, firmly, and with that quiet dignity which gave the best assurance of his freedom from guilt. The governor, more benign and composed in his manner than on the previous day, regarded him almost with a smile as he came in. Still there was no witness present in his behalf. The young man's searching glance discovered all this, and his heart fell. Every instant was hurrying him on to an inevitable fate; yet all his friends seemed asleep. Would no one appear in his behalf — must he indeed lose honor as well as life without a struggle?

An unimportant witness or two were examined, serving to unite the threads of evidence existing against him; then came a moment of breathless suspense, and then the herald called out —

“Prince Orazimbo — is he in court?”

There was a light quick step in the vestibule, the door fell open, and between the two guards stood the young Carib chief, his bow in his grasp, and a richly embroidered quiver on his back, from which the agate and cornelian headed arrows flashed to the vivid light. His tunic, of fine crimson cloth, left one arm and shoulder bare, scarcely falling to his knees, but it was covered with rich embroidery, and the sandals on his feet were buttoned at the instep with precious stones, rough and brilliant.

He advanced with the grace of a young Mercury up the room, and laying his bow on the table before the governor. He spoke in the pure Spanish tongue, and his voice was rich and sonorous, partaking neither of timidity or presumption.

"Here is Orazimbo, does any one wish to question him?"

The governor half rose from his seat.

"Young chief, you know doubtless the charges that have been brought against this cavalier."

"Yes; Arometa told me as we rode from the hills."

"Did these charges originate in you? Has the prisoner at any time instigated you or your people to revolt against the Spaniards of Isabella?"

"He never spoke to me on the subject in his life."

There was a great stir in the court. The officers exchanged glances of quick surprise. The prisoner leaned forward with his lips apart and half smiling. The governor's face brightened all over.

"But, chief, it was your own father that made this charge."

The youth stepped back, and made a gesture of dissent; but instantly his face cleared.

"Many evil persons surround my father, and poison his ear for he is proud and asks no questions — those persons have deceived him with a lie."

"But the prisoner has been often at your father's house during his absence?"

"Yes, often as the flower opens after its night's sleep."

"But what took him there?"

"The cavalier loved my sister Gaurica, and she loved him; that is all."

The crimson rushed over De Leon's face in a glow of deep blushes. A general smile ran through the court.

"And this is all the offence you know against the cavalier De Leon?" said the governor.

"Orazimbo has no offence to charge against this brave soldier. When Arometa sought me in the hills, and said evil men have put a lie in your mouth which may kill a brave man, I came down like a whirlwind to say the truth. I have said it."

"Ay, and bravely said it," exclaimed the governor, standing up before his seat of judgment. "What say you, cavaliers, is this young officer guilty of the treason charged?"

The officers did not leave the court, but drew close together and whispered with smiles on their lips. Then one of the highest in rank spoke out.

"No, by St. Jago! We are all agreed that this is a foul conspiracy to wrong as brave a man as serves among us out of his life. It is our universal verdict, *not guilty*, but more worthy of all honor than he has ever been, is Hernando de Leon."

There was no tumult in the court — the character of the Spanish nation forbade that — but the officers who had been his judges a little minute before, crowded around the young man with warm congratulations, while the governor came down from his dais and thanked the young chief for having done justice to his most valued follower.

But though no tumult was permitted in the court, the corridors

were crowded with armed men, and when they heard the verdict, the grim walls rang with their triumphant shouts.

Amid the confusion, and while De Leon was surrounded by his friends, Orazimbo disappeared. Arometa was waiting for him under the great live oak. It was now twilight; the two chiefs had ridden, as the young Carib had said, like a whirlwind from the hills, and now, that their task was done, both felt weary. So casting themselves on the ground, they sought some rest. But as the darkness closed around them, a horseman swept under the very branches of the oak, and sped toward the fort.

Arometa laughed inly. "He is going to see if the Indian has done his work; watch a little and we shall see a light traveling from his chamber to De Leon's prison, for the twelve hours of daylight and the twelve hours of darkness have passed by. Watch."

Sure enough, after some fifteen minutes, they saw a lamp gleaming from loop-hole to loop-hole along the gallery which led to Heronando's prison. It was Don Guzman going in search of his victim. With a natural consciousness of guilt, he had not ventured to question any one that he met on his way, and so reached the prison-door to find it locked and the sentinel gone.

"Ah, it is all over, and the sentinel has been relieved from guard," he muttered, turning away. "How still it is! well, I have but little stomach for the sight that lies behind this oaken door. So I will go back and think of Guarica — ugh, who would believe a man would shiver so on the night before his marriage."

As Guzman muttered these words, a burst of merriment reached him, sounding cheerily up one of the corridors.

"Ah, they are holding wassail in the banquet-hall, unconscious of what has happened," he said, turning toward the sound. "A cup of wine with good company will not come amiss, for i'faith, my heart seems like ice. What ho, my comrades!"

With this cry he flung the door of the banquet-hall open, and stood in the full light of a dozen silver sconces.

The officers at the table sprang to their feet, each setting down his goblet with a clang; fierce eyes turned on the recreant cavalier, and the stillness of deep indignation fell upon the scene.

While Guzman stood lost in surprise, a goblet was dashed to the stone floor, and, striding down the room with a step that rang out like a defiance, De Leon stood before him, face to face. De Leon, whom he thought lying dead in the dungeon on the other side.

White as death itself the coward turned; his limbs trembled till the gilt spurs on his heels rattled against the floor.

"De Leon," he faltered. "De Leon; and here."

Heronando looked steadfastly in that white face, then with cold and cutting irony addressed him.

"I crave indulgence, Don Guzman de Herreire; your presence reminds me that a man who has a passage at arms before him at the break of day, with so brave a cavalier, should not spend his night in

song or wassail. Gentlemen, I take my leave with many thanks for this festival. Don Guzman de Herreno, at daylight to-morrow we shall meet again, and then God help the right."

Then Don Guzman grew deathly in his pallor, for those stern words reminded him of a challenge that he had accepted for the next morning — the morning of his wedding-day.

While he stood utterly lost and overwhelmed, the revelers glided by him, one by one, each with scorn in his eyes, and the unhappy man was left alone, with the relics of the feast which had celebrated his defeat glittering around him. He sat down by the table, flung his arms across it, and buried his face in them; his limbs shook violently, and great drops of perspiration trembled on his forehead. At last, a gleam of hope shot athwart the darkness of his overthrow. Yes, he would fight; every thing else had failed, and he must fight; but he was a good swordsman, and the chances were equal. What if he should come off conqueror, after all, and leave his enemy bleeding on the greensward, after that the wedding! there was time for both — the combat was to take place at dawn, the marriage at high-noon.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUEL.

THROUGHOUT that long and weary night, the lamp was still replenished in the lone chamber of Don Guzman; and still, from hour to hour, its solitary inmate paced to and fro the floor, his long spurs clanking with a dull and heavy sound on the rude pavement; now pausing to mutter, with clenched hands and writhing lip, fierce imprecations on his own head, on the head of his once loved, but now detested comrade, and on the weak hand which had failed to execute his deadly purpose — now hurrying onward with unequal but swift strides, as though he would have fled the torture of his own guilty thoughts.

Thus did he pass that night, in agony more bitter than the direst tortures that ever tyrant wreaked on mortal body — and when the first gray light of dawn fell cold and chill through the uncurtained casements of his barrack home, it found him haggard and feverish, yet pale, withal, and shivering as though he were an ague-stricken sufferer.

The morning gun pealed sharp and sudden from the ramparts; and far and long its echoes were repeated from the dark forests, which girt in, on every side, with their interminable walls of death-

less verdure, the battlements of Isabella. At the sound, Guzman started as does the miserable, guilty wretch who hears the sullen bell toll the dread signal for his execution! Manning himself, however, with a start — while the blood rushed, as though indignant at his former weakness, to lip and cheek and brow — he instantly resumed his agitated walk; nor did he break it off nor give the smallest symptom of perception, when a quick, hurried blow was struck upon the panel of the door — a second, and a third time, was that low tap repeated, but still Don Guzman heard it not, or if he did hear, he heeded not. Then the door slowly opened, and a gray-headed veteran, clad in the liveries of that noble house, to which, perchance, his master was the first seignior who had brought no luster, thrust in his time-blanchèd locks and war-worn visage —

“Your charger waits, señor,” he whispered; “the hour has long gone by!”

“What hour? — what meanest thou? — gone by? — gone by? Would, would! oh, would to Heaven it had *indeed*, gone by! Ha! what!” he went on, gathering strength as he spoke, and wakening from his wild, waking dreams, to a perception of his true position — “ha! what — hast thou then dared to suffer me neglect it? Death to thy soul, slave! hast thou dared suffer Guzman de Herreiro to fail his plighted word?”

“Not so, not so, mine honored lord,” faltered the faithful vassal. “The hour, indeed, hath passed when thou didst order that thy steed should stand beside the water-gate; and he hath stood and chafed there this half-hour, but scarce five minutes have elapsed, since the gallant Don Hernando hath set forth into the forest; put but spurs to your brave Boabdil, and ere the words are said, you shall o’ertake him!”

“Hurry, then, hurry!” shouted Herreiro, fiercely; and letting on his long Toledo, and casting his broad-brimmed sombrero on his disordered locks, he rushed out, with wild haste, no less to the dismay than the astonishment of his stanch servitor, whom he had summoned, almost savagely, to follow him.

Far otherwise had passed the hours of darkness to Hernando de Leon. The banquet ended, he had withdrawn as calmly to his chamber, as though he had no farther object than to lie down upon a peaceful bed, that he might thence arise with the succeeding morn to go about his wonted avocations. He had sat down before his little escrutoir, and having finished several letters, sealed and directed them, cast off his vest and doublet, and drawn from his feet his falling leathern buskins — then throwing himself upon his knees, beside his pallet-bed, buried his head between his hands, and for some minutes prayed, as it would seem, in deep, though silent fervor.

Rising, at length, erect, he spread his arms abroad, and in a clear high voice, unconscious, evidently, that he spoke aloud — “and above all, bear witness, Thou,” he cried, “bear witness, Thou, who knowest and who seest all things — that not in any mortal

wrath — not in the mood of blind and senseless anger, nor in that selfish strain of vengeance which recks of private injury — do I go forth unto this strife — but as unto a high, yet painful duty! — not as mine own avenger — for to Thee, and to Thee only, doth belong the right of vengeance! — but as the vindicator of society, the punisher of crime, which else must go unpunished; the righter of the wronged; the champion of the weak; the faithful, although frail defender of Thine holy law. If this be not so, leave me, Thou, O Lord — give me up to the mercies of my direct foe — suffer me to fall unavenged, unwept, unhonored! But if in truth, and honor, and in right I do go forth, strike Thou, as is Thy wont, for the right likewise.”

This said, he lay down quietly upon his couch; and, ere five minutes had passed over, slept peacefully and sweetly as an infant, until the self-same gun, which had aroused Don Guzman from the perturbed visions of his guilty conscience, broke his refreshing slumbers. Arising instantly, he, too, girt on his sword, buckled his mantle over his broad chest, fixed his hat firmly on his head, and strode forth, all unsummoned, to the water-gate.

There stood four noble chargers; his own proud Andalusian, with a less high-bred charger at his side, backed by the page Alenzo; who, with a merlin on his wrist, and the two powerful bloodhounds, without which never did Hernando ride forth into the wilderness, crouching before him, sat patiently awaiting the arrival of his lord. A little way aloof, a manial, clad in rich liveries of Isabel and silver, held the bay coursers of Herreiro and his old esquire.

No feet did Don Hernando set in stirrup, but seizing the reins firmly in his left hand, while, with his right, he grasped the cantle of his demipique, he swung himself, at once, with a light leap, to his charger's back; bolt upright did the fiery creature bound into the air, tossing his stag-like head, and long thin mane aloft, in glorious exultation; but, firm as though he had been, like the fabled centaurs of old time, a portion of the animal which he bestrode, so fearlessly and well the rider sat undaunted. Flinging his reins free to the impulse of the fiery horse, while he yet stood erect, he curbed him tightly up as his feet struck the sod; and slightly pricking him with his long gilded spurs, dashed off, at a hard gallop, into the wild glades of the the forest.

A short mile's distance from the walls of Isabella, embosomed in deep woodlands, there was a small savannah, scarcely a hundred yards across, clothed with a rich, short grass which, in that lovely climate, never, at any season, lost the rich freshness of its emerald verdure; for, in its farthest curve, lurking beneath the shelter of a group of tall and feathery palm-trees, there lay the basin of a tiny crystal spring, whence, welling forth in copious and perennial beauty, a silver streamlet issued, and, compassing two-thirds of that small plain with its refreshing waters, stole away silently among the devious wilds, through which it flowed, unmarked, into the neighboring sea.

Here it was — here, in this lovely and secluded spot, far — far as it would seem, removed from the fierce turmoil, the stern bitterness, the angry hatreds of the world, the two men met.

For half an hour, at least, Hernando had sat there, motionless as a statue, upon his docile charger, awaiting, in the center of that sylvan solitude, the coming of the man to whom, for having sought to slay him with the secret shaft of the assassin, and afterwards to dishonor him, he now extended the high privilege of striving to amend his aim in open day-light, and fair conflict with the hilt of his weapon.

Hard by the lovely spring, the page Alonso had looped the bridle of his tall gray charger to the tough stem of a mimosa, and now sat on the mossy turf, toying with the gigantic hounds, which he held closely coupled by a chain of tempered steel riveted firmly to their stout leathern collars; while, perched on a projecting limb of the same tree to which the horse was fastened, the hooded merlin dozed, with its bells ready on its yellow legs, and its light jesses hanging all unfastened.

Just as Hernando had begun to marvel at the protracted absence of his intended slayer, the sharp and rattling clatter of a horse's gallop, tearing his route through the dense saplings of the tangled wood, was heard approaching; and, in another moment, his reins and neck and chest embossed with flakes of snow-white foam, and his flanks bleeding from incessant spurring, Herreiro's charger bore him, at the top of his speed, upon the scene of action.

As he approached, Hernando raised his hat with the stern courtesy exacted by the strict punctilio of the duel from every honorable cavalier; yet, well-schooled, as he was, to suppress each outward token of every inward sentiment, the noble cavalier half started, as he beheld the ravages worked by a single night of anguish on the proud mien and comely features of his antagonist. His hair, which, on the previous morning, had been as dark and glossy as the raven's wing, was now not merely tangled most disorderly, in hideous curls, but actually streaked with many a lock of gray, while his whole visage, which, though swart and somewhat stern, had yet been smooth and seemly, was scored by many a line and furrow, plowed deep into the flesh, during those few fleet hours, by the hot plowshare of remorse and scorching anguish. No salutation did he make in answer to the bow of his brave young opponent; but whirling his long rapier from its sheath —

“Draw!” he cried, “draw, sir! Look on the sun for the last time, and die!” as he spoke, plunging his spurs, even more furiously than he had done before, into the bleeding flanks of his good horse, he dashed, at once, upon him, sword in hand, hoping, it was most evident, to take him at advantage, and bear him, unprepared, to earth. If such, however, were his ungenerous and foul intent, most grievously was he frustrated by the calm skill and perfect resolution of Hernando; who, merely gathering his reins a little tighter, un-

sheathed his keen toledo — and, without moving one yard from the spot whereon his Andalusian stood, watching, with fiery eye and broad-expanded nostrils, the motions of the other charger, yet showing by no symptom, save the quivering of his erected ears, that he was conscious of the coming strife — extended it, with the point slightly elevated, toward Herreiro's face.

On came the horse-assault — on ! with the speed of light ! — but left hand creeping the reins firmly — his right drawn back, in preparation for the deadly thrust, far past his hip : while the bright point of the long two-edged blade was glittering in advance of the bay charger's mouth ! — Now they are within half sword's length ! — and now ! — see ! see that quick, strident flash, bright as the stream of the electric fluid, and scarce — if any thing — less rapid ! — it was the thrust of Guzman, well aimed, and sped with strength, that, had it reached the mark, must have propelled it through the stoutest corslet that ever buckled breast ; much more through the slight silken jerkin, which was the only armor that would have met its brunt.

Midway, however, in its glancing course, it was met by the calm, firm parry of Hernando's sword ; and thus, diverted from its true direction, passed harmlessly, slightly grazing the bridle-arm of the young cavalier. — On came Herreiro still — and, for an instant's space, it seemed as though the shock of his charger, at full speed, must have borne down the slighter Andalusian ; but scarcely had he parried that home thrust, before, with a quick motion of the bridle-hand — so quick, indeed, that it was scarce perceptible — and a slight corresponding pressure of the spur on the flank opposite, Hernando wheeled his charger to the left ; feinted a thrust at his foe's face ; and, circling quite around him, delivered a full, sweeping cut against the back part of his neck.

With perfect mastery of steed and weapon, Don Guzman met this perilous and unexpected movement. Pulling so hard on his long Moorish curb, that his horse, checked at once, stood upright, and almost fell backward on his haunches, he swung his sword round to the guard so actively, that the strong blow fell harmless. Then they closed hand to hand ; fragments of the short, mossy turf flew high into the air, spurned by the iron hoofs of the excited chargers ; sparks flew from the collision of the well-tempered blades ; feathers were short, blood flowed on either side ; yet neither faltered nor flinched.

At length, a furious downright cut, aimed by Don Guzman, tall at Hernando's head, glanced from his guard, and falling on the ear of the high-blooded Andalusian, almost disengaged it ! Maddened with torture, the brave brute obeyed the bit no longer, but, with a yell of agony, bolted, despite the utmost efforts of the rider.

Herreiro marked his advantage, and, as the horse uncontrollably dashed by him, cut, by a second rapid lunge, his adversary's rein asunder. — Frantic, although he was, with pain, and freed from the direct restraint of the half-useless bridle, Hernando was not carried far, before he had recovered mastery enough to wheel his Andalusian round once more to the encounter.

Perceiving, instantly, that all chance of success by rapid turns or quick maneuvering was at an end, he — now adopting his opponent's system — dashed straight upon him, — and, when within arm's length, throwing his own reins loose, caught, with his left hand, the long silver check-piece of Herreiro's bit, wheeling his own horse counter to flank upon him, by the mere dint of spur, without the slightest exercise of bit or bridle; and shortened, at the same time, his sword, to plunge it from above, into the throat of the assassin.

It seemed as though no earthly power could have availed to rescue Guzman from his desperate situation. His horse, exhausted by his own exertions, reeled visibly beneath the shock; his rapier, far extended and abroad, could by no means have parried the down thrust which hung above him, but in that very point of time — that very second, long as a thousand ages — wherein he saw the dark glance of his injured comrade's eye fixed bitterly upon him; wherein he noted the grim smile mantling upon his scornful lip; wherein he shuddered at the gleaming point of the suspended rapier, which no effort of his own could possibly avert. In that dread point of time a yelling shout arose from all the circumjacent woodlands — a howl — as though the fiends had all broke loose, to rent the upper air with their discordant voices. With the yell, a volley of flint-headed arrows, came hurtling through the air — another — and another. But, with the first, Herreiro's half-won triumph ended; for, as he brandished his avenging sword aloft, clear through his elevated wrist drove the long Carib shaft — a second grazed his plume — a third, most fatal of the light, pierced through the very heart of his proud Andalusian, and hurled him lifeless to the earth.

Herreiro turned — turned for base flight — but not long did his forfeit life remain to him — for, with the second volley, down went both horse and man, transixed by fifty shafts, gory and lifeless! — “Mount! mount! Menso — mount, boy and fly,” shouted the dauntless cavalier, as he lay wounded and encumbered by his slaughtered horse! The bold boy heard, but he obeyed not! Forth he rushed, sword in hand — forth to the rescue of his lord — and forth, at the same instant, from the forest, forth sped the Carib Caonobo and his unconquered horde, with spear, and mace, and bow, and whoop and barbarous war-cry!

“Down with your foolish sword — 'tis madness to resist,” cried the young Spaniard. “Your horse is strong, turn and fly.”

The page lessened his rein, and took in the danger with a keen glance.

“Take this to the chief Arameta; tell him what has chanced, and if you see me not alive again, have masses said for my soul.”

As he spoke, Herreiro tore the Carib's belt from his loins, and flung it with a last desperate hope, toward the boy. A dash at the belt, and away the page plunged, leaping his horse over the slain steed of his master — over the stark body of Don Guzman, and away through the wild wood. The feathers in his hat streaming out

straight on the wind, and the gilded belt flashing like a meteor to the sunshine. A flight of arrows whizzed after the brave boy, but his progress had been so swift, that they fell spent on the way, and he fled unharmed toward the fort.

The moment he was gone, a dozen hands seized upon De Leon, and he was the fettered captive of the invincible cacique Caonabo.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRIDAL MORN

The residence of Don Juan Rodriguez presented a beautiful appearance on the morning appointed for Guarica's marriage with Don Guzman de Heredia. There was no need of grouping exotics or weaving festal garlands in that lovely spot; for every other tree threw forth masses of rich blossoms, and most of those which were not in flower, were entwined with glossy green parasites that gave a rare variety of tints to their greenness.

Some preparation there was, but of a sad and mournful kind. Guarica, who would as soon have dreamed of resisting heaven as her proud father, awoke to this morning with a brow of marble and a heart of lead. While her handmaids were busy with the sumptuous garments, just imported from Old Spain, she stole away from their hateful splendor and went down to the arbor where so many sweet hours of her life had been spent with Hernando.

This arbor had been sadly neglected of late, and with the quick growth of the climate, curtains of vines and blossoms had matted themselves around its slender pillars. The long, unpruned branches swayed and whispered in the wind, filling the neighborhood with weird-like music. Thus, when the poor maiden came to her retreat, she was received by a thousand sighs, which seemed to come from her neglected flowers. Her two fawns had grown wild also, and stood behind a thicket, staring at her with their great eyes, as if she had been a stranger.

Guarica had no heart to claim the notice of her pretty favorites, but went sadly into the arbor, wishing that it were her grave. Her lute lay upon the cushions within, as she had left it days ago, after a wearying waiting for the lover who must visit that place no more; two or three books peeped from beneath the cushions her maidens had forgotten to remove, and which were now heavy with moisture. Damp as the cushions were, Guarica fell upon her knees and, bowing her face upon them, burst into a passionate fit of weeping, broken with vague prayers for help which she still despaired of receiving.

The sound drew her fawns toward the arbor, where they stood for a moment timidly looking on. Then, assured by her well-known voice, they crept to her side and softly licked the hand with which she grasped the cushion.

Guarica uttered a low cry, half thanksgiving half despair. She was not forsaken — something upon the earth still loved and had pity on her.

With the same heavy feeling at heart, and tears swelling under her eyelids, she gathered up the lute and licks and hid them away under the cushions which she would never repose on again, for henceforth that arbor must be a forbidden place to her, the associations would be dangerous and — oh, how terribly painful in a few hours more! The fawns followed her around with puzzled docility. They did not quite recognize their young mistress in her sorrow. It was unnatural to them as her.

A voice from the dwelling called her back to deeper misery. She started like a guilty thing — gave a piteous look at her fawns, and hurried away.

The Carib maidens were waiting sadly in her apartment, bewildered by the gorgeous array of dresses that had been placed for her choice. From this day she was to give up her Indian habits and costume, which had always given a classic grace to her beauty.

The Carib maidens were sad as herself; for a woman had been brought from Isabella to supersede them about her person, and when they began to take off her Carib dress, the sound of their grief was audible. With a feeling of wild desperation she submitted to be robed for her martyrdom. As each Carib ornament was taken from her person, it seemed as if a heart-string broke, and when the dress of damassine silk enveloped her with its voluminous richness, and her pretty feet, unaccustomed to any thing but her embroidered sandals, were encased in stiff, high-heeled shoes, she felt like a prisoner submitting to inevitable chains.

At last she was ready. Her beautiful hair drawn into a massive knot and prisoned under a glittering caul — her face, neck, and arms shrouded in lace and silk. How she hated herself in this dress! for it was the forerunner and proof of a terrible future. How strange and unnatural she seemed to herself in these robes, waiting the appearance of a man whom she hated to the very core of her heart, and yet must live with and try to endure forever! These thoughts drove all the blood from that beautiful face. Her very hands grew chill as marble when her father came, in his stately way, and kissing her cold forehead, pronounced her beautiful.

For a moment she had some vague idea of appealing to her father for mercy, but his stern looks, when she was about to plead, drove the words from her lips.

By this time guests were assembling on the grounds. The most distinguished people of the town and officers from the fortress came in gay and brilliant cavalcades, riding fleet horses through the forest.

The governor from Isabella and his household were of the number, and following him close came the Spanish priest, whose solemn duty it would be to pronounce the nuptial benediction.

Don Rodriguez received his guests with the dignified courtesy which became his surroundings well; but Guarica stood by his side silent and still, gazing away into the distance, as if she expected some help from afar which must surely come.

The guests had all assembled — knights and ladies full of cheerful expectation. The priest was there, and the bride, but minute after minute glided by and still no bridegroom. Where was Don Guzman de Herreiro?

The governor of Isabella knew that he had ridden out early that morning, apparently for exercise in the forest, and if any of the officers guessed at another motive, they hesitated to mention these surmises in the presence of the bride, whose silence they mistook for loving anxiety.

At last, when a chill was beginning to creep over the guests, and the frown grew dark on Don Rodriguez' brow, a horseman was seen dashing headlong through the forest and across the open glade before the house. With a frightful leap he cleared the cactus fence, and, without drawing rein, dashed into the midst of the wondering guests.

Before the boy could speak, many a person from the fort recognized Alonso, the page of Don Hernando de Leon, who sat panting on his horse searching for the governor of Isabella with his eagle eyes.

"My lord! my lord — back to the town — back to Fort Isabella — man the walls — load pistolet and culverin — place every sentinel at his post — Cacolo is not two miles away! The forest is alive with his warriors — he threatens the peaceful tribes of Orazimbo — he intends to swoop like a falcon down upon the fort and take it by surprise. My lord," he continued drawing a quick breath, and dashing the moisture from his brow with one hand, while he held out the golden belt with the other, at which Guarica uttered a faint cry, for she remembered the Carib's pledge, and knew that it had been given to Hernando — "My lord, where is Araceta? where is Orazimbo with his men? all will be wanted to crush this cacique. Don Guzman de Herreiro lies stark and dead on the greensward of the forest, slain by the ruthless Cacolo, and —" a cry from the bride reminded the boy of his indiscretion in telling this sad news in her presence. He looked at Don Rodriguez, asking pardon with his fine eyes, but that instant the bride stepped forward, her face startlingly alive though it was pale as marble.

"The belt — that belt, whence came it? for whom is it intended?" she questioned.

"It came from my master, lady, Don Hernando de Leon, who was this morning taken captive while engaged in mortal combat with — with — your pardon, lady; but he was carried off by the cacique Cacolo. While a pack of savages held him in their toils, he broke away, flung this belt from their midst, and shouted for me to bear it,

like the wind, to Aroneta or Orazimbo, and bid them take horse at once and charge on the usurper's track. This done, he bade me ride for life and death alarm the fort, which,—by St Jago! I have done, for the men are dragging forth culverins and pikes till the walls bristle again. Now, fair lady, forgive me, that I intrude on your grief; and if you can do me the grace, tell me where the young chief, your brother, is to be found, for every moment is precious."

Guarica approached close to the page, her eyes on fire and her cheek glowing.

"Ride to the northward; one with a fresh steed will follow and lead the way. Stop for no word, but go!"

The page wheeled his horse instantly, leaped the cactus hedge, and rode off at full speed, waiting for no second bidding.

While the frightened guests were dispersing, like a flock of frightened birds, Guarica disappeared. The directions to the page had been heard by no one, for the startling tidings of Caonobo's presence near the fort turned the entertainment into a scene of wild confusion. Thus Guarica passed through her father's guests unnoticed, and ran swiftly to the chamber usually occupied by her brother. Here she found a Carib boy busy arranging Orazimbo's weapons on the wall.

"Go" she said, "put harness on Prince Orazimbo's fleetest horse. Lead him behind the cactus hedge and wait."

The boy sprang away to perform her bidding.

The moment he was alone, Guarica tore off the gorgeous raiment in which they had invested her for the bridal, shook her rich locks free from their golden net-work, and seizing a dress which her brother had cast aside, arrayed herself in it. Snatching a quiver from the wall, she buckled it to her shoulder, and with his bow in her grasp, sprang away through the affrighted crowd. She passed her father, as he was preparing to ride toward Isabella with the governor, without recognition, ran down the garden, sprang upon her brother's steed, and away, swift as the wind and exultant as a forest-bird.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTIVE.

ALL day long the wily savages retreated, through the most wild and devious recesses of the forest, toward their mountain fastnesses, forcing their hapless captives, wounded though they were and faint and weary, to strain every muscle to keep up with them. At midday, for a half hour, they halted at a bright, crystal spring, deep-bosomed in the pathless wilderness, kindled their fires, and applied themselves to prepare their artless meal.

Most picturesque and striking was the aspect of that wild halt; the white smoke curling up in snowy columns, strongly relieved by the dark foliage; the bright and sparkling fires casting their red reflection on the gigantic barks of the innumerable trees; the flexible and graceful forms of the lake, a live natives reclining in small groups upon the deep, rich turf, or hurrying to and fro with swift and agile movements; their arms piled up in glittering stacks, or swinging from the limbs of the embowering shrubs. Most picturesque it was and most romantic; and had it been at any other time, no eye would have dwelt on it with more earnest pleasure — no fancy would have sported more poetically with all its thousand accidents of light and shade, repose contrasted with swift motion, rare grouping, and bright, gorgeous coloring, than that of the young Spaniard.

But as he lay beneath the canopy of a superb kinnock, with arms painfully lashed behind his back with thongs recently cut from a raw deer-hide, his thoughts were all too painfully absorbed, too vaguely wandering and dissipated, to suffer him to dwell upon or notice that gay spectacle.

Conjecture was at work within his brain; but, busy as it was, no clue presented itself to his mind whereby to solve the mystery. All was dark, intricate, and gloomy. By no means could he discover or divine what could have been the cause of such an arrest, by what strange accident could the rendezvous for the duel have been fixed at the precise spot where the Carls had their rendezvous? for that they could have learned the location of the duel was on the very face impossible? why, such a piece of bad luck should have been witnessed — for the land was, at the very least, well known, full five hundred strong — under their most renowned champion, to interrupt a combat between two Spanish warriors? or why, supposing, as it was far more natural to deem, that the true object of the expedition had contemplated some end widely different — after the accidental capture of one soldier, the accidental purpose of the onslaught had been laid by and overlooked in the delight arising from a success so slight and unimportant.

Deeply, however, as he pondered, he found not, as has been stated heretofore, the smallest clue whereby to reach the termination of the maze in which his thoughts were so mysteriously involved. At times a wild and anxious terror would possess his mind with the idea that his capture must be connected in some wise with his reported visits to the Carls' mansion — whom he had so enthralled within his heart of hearts — meet and for that might shame — that the most distant surmise of peril, to which she should be exposed, shook his strong nerves, even as an earthquake agitates the rock-ribbed mountains.

Again, as reason told him that such fancies were the mere visionary workings of a self-tormenting spirit, his features would array themselves in a win, slowly smile, and he would deem for a brief moment that cheerfulness and hope were re-established in his heart.

Thus passed the midday halt; the simple preparations for the Indian meal were ended; and, seated on the velvet-cushioned green

ward, the natives ate in silence and in haste, betokening the need of rare and, to their inert and voluptuous characters, unwelcome toil.

Food and a calabash of water were set before Hernando, and a significant although mute gesture urged him to profit by the opportunity thus offered; but, though he was aware of the necessity of keeping up, as far as possible, his physical, as well as mental powers, in order to exert himself on any chance occasion to effect his escape from the fierce savages, the fever of his wounds, exalted by the anxiety and burning bitterness of his soul, had parched his throat and lips, and he turned with irrepressible and painful loathing from the viands which, though rude and simple, might well have satisfied the palate of a soldier fasting since the preceding night, and spent with toil and travel.

Deeply, however, did he drink of the cool crystal liquid with which his parched mouth was often and again replenished by a young, bright-eyed youth, of gentler mien and milder features than any other of the Caribs, who, from the first, had hovered unmarked about the captives, and who now smiled cheerily upon Hernando while ministering, with something of solicitude and tenderness, to his most pressing wants.

After the Spaniard had exhausted, at a single draught, the second gourd of water, and had relapsed already into the deep abstraction of his own fevered thoughts, he was half-startled by the soothing pressure of a cool, soft hand upon his burning brow, having his temples with the same pure, icy element which had so gratefully relieved his fiery thirst. Lifting his eyes with a sudden impulse, he caught again the features of the slight Indian boy, which several times before had met his gaze that morning, although unnoticed in the engrossing tumult of his senses.

Again a brilliant smile glanced over the dark lineaments, and a quick flashing light, as if of well-pleased recognition, leaped from the lustrous eyes. Although the face was strange, although, to the best of the young Spaniard's memory, never had these dusky features met his eyes, there was yet something familiar in their aspect — something which brought back, Hernando knew not why, bright thoughts of by-gone days and kindled fervent hopes of future welfare. Something there certainly was of indistinct and vague similitude to some one he had seen before, although he could not, on the instant, bring to his mind time, or place, or person.

Thought was at work within him to make out wherein, and to whom, lay this strange similitude; while still the gentle hand steeped his hot forehead, and the mild eyes gazed into his with almost female tenderness.

Sudden it flashed upon him — sudden as the electric gleam — a radiant light shot from his clouded eyes, his lips moved, and the first syllables of an Indian word were quivering on his tongue. But the boy, instantly appreciating the meaning of that sudden luster, assumed a grave and warning air, pressed his fore-finger on his lip — then he waved his left hand with a gesture so

slight, as to be imperceptible except to him for whom it was intended, toward the great chieftain Cacuabo, who lay at a short distance under the overhanging shadow of a huge forest tree, mantled with thousands of sweet parasites. Cacuabo was engaged in consultation, as it would seem from their grave brows and quiet gestures, of deep import with his superior warriors. With this graceful gesture, the boy turned away and was lost instantly to the sight of Hernando. The Carib soldiery were now mustering fast, their simple meal concluded, as for their onward route.

Another moment, and the gigantic cacique up-started to his feet; he snatched from the branch, whence they had hung above his head, his long, tough bow and gayly decorated quiver, and strung them across his naked shoulders; then he braced on his left arm a light buckler, covered with thin plates of the purest gold; and, grasping in his right a ponderous mace of iron-wood, curiously carved and toothed at every angle with rows of jagged shells, stalked with an air of native dignity, which could not have been out-done, had it been equaled, by the noblest potentate of Europe's haughtiest court. Across the green savannah he strode, and stood among his warrior-subjects, the mightiest and noblest of them all — the mightiest and the noblest — not in the vain attributes of rank and birth alone — not in the temporal power only, which may be, and oft is, bestowed upon the weak of limb and low of spirit — but in the thews and sinews — the energies — the daring and the soul — the power to do and to suffer — the sublime and unmoved constancy of purpose — the indomitable, irresistible resolve — the all which makes our man superior to his fellows.

A moment he stood there, gazing around him with a fearless and proud glance upon the muster of his tribe's best soldiers. Then speaking a few words in an undertone to a tall savage, who, throughout the day, had been the highest to his person, he stalked off. Slowly followed four, at least, of the five hundred which composed his band, in a direction nearly at right angles to the blind path which they had hitherto pursued, and which might be perceived, beyond the little area, diving right onward, between walls of impenetrable verdure, into the far depths of the forest.

No dash of weapons — no clang of martial instruments — no heavy tramp of footsteps betrayed the movements of that armed array. Silently, one by one, in single file, they gleamed, like ghosts upon the eye of De Leon, as they disappeared, each after each, and shot again, each after each, into sight for a moment's space, among the vast trunks of the forest through which they held their silent march.

Scarcely had the last of this train vanished from his sight, before the tall savage to whose ear the parting words of Cacuabo had been uttered, marshaled the little band which had been left, as it would seem, under his sole command. Fifty of these, bearing their long bows ready bent, with a flint-headed arrow notched on the string of each, filed off under the guidance of an old hoary-headed Carib,

whose wrinkled brow, and lean, attenuated frame would have denoted him as one taut for deeds of toil or daring, had not they been even more distinctly contradicted by the light vigor of his every motion, by the keen fire of his glaring eyes, and by the sinewy grace with which he wielded his war weapons.

At the same stealthy cat-like pace, which he had marked in the warriors of the larger band, these dark-skinned archers threaded the defile of the umbrageous path. This path was so narrow as scarcely to admit one man, and was so densely walled by brakes of cane and prickly shrubs, that it would have been a harder task to penetrate their leafy rampart, than to carve out a path through the most powerful bastions that mortal workman ever framed of the eternal granite.

A signal from the chief directed him to follow, and, conscious of the entire hopelessness of any present opposition to his will, recruited somewhat by his brief repose, and cheered yet more by the imagination that in the number of his captives he had found, at the least, one friend, Hernando entered with a quick and spraggy step the dim pass. Hand upon his heels, urging him close up to the warrior who preceded him, strode the tall figure of the Carib captain, followed in turn by the remainder of his train. Onward they marched — still onward, tracking the windings of that narrow road, through the deep matted swamp — over the rocky ledge — among the giants of the forest — still walled at every point by masses of luxuriant verdure so dense as to make twilight of the scorching noonday, still so defined that a blind man might have groped out his way unerringly, and still so straight that it was utterly impossible for two to go abreast.

The only changes to the dark monotony of this dim defile were when it forded some wild torrent, brawling along in gloomy discontent among the tangled thickets; or when it crossed, upheld on narrow causeways of rude logs, some wood-girt pool, half lake and half morass, where, for a little space, the weary eye might strive to penetrate the arched vista, through which framed the restless streamlet; or dwell upon the dull and lead-like surface of the small standing pool. Onward they marched — still onward! The sun, which all unmarked had climb the height of heaven, and all unseen descended to its western verge, stooped like a giant brolegroom to his bed, and a more dull and browner horror overspread the trackless forest.

The stars came out in the translucent skies, spangling the firmament with their unnumbered smiles, but not one thoughtful glance might penetrate the solid vault of the greenery which overenveloped their route. The broad, bright moon soared up, far o'er the tangled tree-tops, and here and there pencil of soft luster streamed downward through some verdant crevice, and a mild hazy light diffused itself even in that murky avenue.

Onward they marched — still onward — at one unwearied, even, silent pace. No halt was made at eventide — no halt at the deep

midnight. The young Spaniard, proud though he was of his capacity to bear, well trained in every manly and martial exercise, felt that he was but a child in strength and in activity among the dark sons of the forest. Onward they marched — still onward — and it was only by the utmost and most resolute exertion that Hernando could maintain the steady, swift pace which his captors held, without one pant disturbing the calm tenor of their breathing, or one sweat-drop appearing on their muscular and swart frames.

Daybreak was near at hand — a deeper gloom had followed on the setting moon — the stars had set — and a chill freshness in the air betokened the approach of morning, although the skies were yet undinged by any gleam of light, when a low whistle was heard from the head of the long file — man by man it passed rearward — and all halted.

After a second's space there was a forward movement, and after a few steps, Hernando might perceive that the path opened somewhat, and that the men, who went before him, fell orderly and steadily as they advanced into a column of three front, halting, however, as they did so, in order that no interval might be left in their line of march.

Then scarcely had he moved half a yard beyond the spot whereat the wider road commenced, before the tall chief, mentioned heretofore, and the man next behind him moved simultaneously, by a quick, pard-like spring, to either side of him, and grasped his arms above the elbow with firm though not painful pressure. Meanwhile the heavens had brightened somewhat, and he might see that a huge rocky hill, or, as it might have been termed not inaptly, mountain, rose suddenly with an abrupt and giant barrier directly in their front.

A narrow road climbing the height by difficult, precipitous zigzags, so steep and rugged that even the well-breathed and active natives were forced, from time to time, to pause in the ascent to catch their falling breath. They scaled this vast front of bare and shrubless rock, and as they paused at every angle, Hernando might look back upon the little progress they had made, and mark the almost insuperable difficulties which would present themselves to the advance of any civilized force, by so untamed a road. Rough as it was, however, and difficult of access, an hour of constant labor brought them at last in safety to the summit.

Here a scene widely different from the bleak, herbless crags which, with so much of labor, they had scaled, presented itself to the Spaniard's eye. A table of rich, fertile land of many miles' circumference, was here outspread upon the ledgy top of the huge hill which fell abruptly down on every side, a precipice of several hundred feet in sheer descent, accessible alone by steep and zigzag paths, like that by which his weary feet had painfully surmounted its ascent. Groves of the richest verdure towered high above the black and broken rocks which walled them in on every side — fields, richly

clothed with the tall maize, mottled and twinkled in the morning air. Streamlets of crystal water meandered to and fro, until they reached the steep brink, when they plunged in bright and foamy cataracts down to the vale below.

Here, embosomed in the verdant groves, circled with rich and fertile fields, watered by rills of most translucent water — here on a summit never before trodden by the foot of European, lay the secluded fastness of the Carib Cacnoko — a village larger and more neatly built than any which Hernando had yet seen in the fair island of Hispaniola. Some two or, at the most, three hundred cottages, of the low Indian fashion, with roofs thatched by the spreading palm-leaves, and pillared porticoes, were scattered about in careless groups, irregularly mixed with groves and gardens, and carefully surrounded by a deep ditch supplied with water from a dam upon a neighboring streamlet, and a stockade composed of massive timbers of the already famous iron-wood, framed with much skill and ingenuity, in imitation of the Spanish palisades.

Columns of smoke were curling gayly upward from every cottage roof, and lights were glancing cheerily from every open door, and wide, unlatted casement. Merry voices rang in friendly converse or unthinking song through the long village streets; but none came forth to greet or cheer the wounded, weary stranger, who was dragged on, right on, wistfully eyeing the bright fireside, and listening with anxious ears to the gay sounds of merriment, among which he stood alone and almost hopeless.

At length, when he had passed every home — when the lights and sounds had faded into distance, the land, which might be said to bear, rather than now to lead him onward, halted before a towering pile of rock upon the further verge of the small area of the table-land, contiguous to the stern precipice. A light was perceived instantly by one of the Indians of the tribe, and by it was revealed a natural aperture in the dark rock, defended by a grated wicket composed of massive beams of iron-wood, securely fastened by a lock of Spanish manufacture.

A key was instantly produced from the tall chieftain's girdle, and without a word of explanation the gate was opened, the Spaniard's bonds were loosened, a pile of cloaks of the rude native cotton was hung down in a dark recess of the cave, which, by the dim light of the flickering torch, appeared of immense magnitude. Hernando was thrust violently in, the torch extinguished, and the gate closed on the moment, locked and double-locked behind him.

For a short time he listened to the departing footsteps of his captors, then, cut lone with weariness and woe, he muttered his holy orisons, and, throwing himself down at full length on the simple pallet, slept tranquilly and soundly till the sun of a new day shone high in the blue heavens.

CHAPTER XV

THE CARIB'S CAVE.

THE sun was high in heaven, when Hernando de Leon awoke from the deep but perturbed and restless slumbers, which, induced by the fever of his wounds, and the toilsome journey of the preceding day, had fallen on him, almost before his limbs were stretched upon their temporary couch. The bright rays streaming in between the massive beams that barred the portal of his dungeon, full of ten thousand dancing notes, had fallen full upon his face and uncurtained eyelids, dazzling the orbs within, so that, when he started from his dreamless sleep, it was a moment or two before he could so far collect his thoughts, unaided by the prompting of his eyesight, as to discover where he was, or what had been the circumstances which placed him in that wild abode.

By slow degrees, however, the truth dawned upon his mind; and, with the truth, that dull sense of oppression, that dense and smothering weight, which, to souls of the highest order and most delicate perceptions, seems ever to attend the loss of liberty. For a while, therefore, he brooded gloomily and darkly over the strange events of the past day; the singular mode in which he had been so unexpectedly entrapped; the unexplained and unintelligible conduct of the savages; and, above all, the motives which had influenced their treatment of himself.

Hence his thoughts strayed, by no unnatural transition, to the mild features and kind ministry of the Carib boy, but though he probed his memory to its lowest depths, he could not satisfy himself of aught pertaining to those half-remembered lineaments. After a little space, wandering again, his spirit began to reflect upon the chances of his liberation; nor did he meditate long upon this topic, before he came to the conclusion that for his present escape from the bonds of the fierce cacique, and for his ultimate return to the settlement of his countrymen, he must rely upon his own energies. Hope of assistance from without was evidently desperate. The speed and secrecy with which the Indians had conducted their retreat — the ignorance of all his comrades respecting his own movements on that eventful morning — the death flight, or capture of all those who had been privy to the time or place of his encounter with Herreiro; and, above all, the great and almost certain probability, that some

ulterior object, involving inroads upon the Spanish posts, of magnitude sufficient to engage their occupants, exclusively, in their own self-preservation, had drawn the wily Cañobo to such a distance from his usual fastnesses.

All these considerations led the young captive to believe, that on himself alone — on his own often tried resources — on his own resolute will, and unflinching nerves — on his own deep sagacity, and dauntless courage — on his own hardness of heart, and corresponding energy of thews and sinews, depended all his hopes of extrication from imprisonment. His incarceration promised to be long indeed and painful, unless it should be brought to a more speedy, though no less unwished termination, through the medium of a violent and cruel death.

Stimulated by reflections such as these, to something of exertion, Hernando rose from his lowly couch, with the intent of exploring, to the utmost, the secrets of his prison-house. So far as the uncertain light, checkered and broken by the gratings through which it found its way, permitted him to judge, his dungeon seemed of considerable depth and magnitude. To his great surprise, as he raised himself, he perceived that during his slumbers his dungeon had been visited by some one, who had left, hard by his humble pillow, a calabash of pure cold water, with a slight meal of fruits and the cassava bread, which formed the principal article of nutriment among the simple Indians.

So sound had been his sleep, that the noise of opening the heavy, creaking gate had fallen unheard and unheeded on his dulled senses. To lave his heated brow and hands in the cool element — to quaff a long, long draught, more soothing and delicious in his present temper, than the most fragrant wines of Xeres, or the yet more renowned and costly Br de Penas, was his first impulse; but when, refreshed and reinvigorated by the innocent cup, he turned to taste the viables before him, his weary soul revolted from the untouched morsel, the rising spasm of the throat, the *hysterica passio* of poor Lear, convulsed him.

Casting the food from him, he buried his hot, aching temples in his hand, and remained for many minutes, plunged as it were, in a deep stupor. Then, by a mighty effort, shaking off the lethargic gloom, he drank again, more deeply than before, — sprang to his feet, and strode with firm and rapid steps, several times to and fro the area of the prison, immediately within the wicket, where fell the brightest glances of the half-interrupted sunlight.

"Shame, shame!" he cried, at length, giving articulate expression to his thoughts — "shame, shame, on thee, Hernando! — to pine and give way thus beneath the pressure of so slight an evil!" "What is this to thy hard, soul-cankering captivity, among the savage painimry of Spain — when, fettered to the floor, thou languishedst for nine long months, unvisited by the fair light of heaven. Shame! it must not be!"

Hernando manned himself upon the instant, by a single effort, and turning from the light, explored with cautious scrutiny each nook and angle of the cavern. It was of large extent; wide, deep, full of dark, irregular recesses; and seemed to have been used as a species of magazine or store-house; for piles of dried fish, baskets of wicker-work, heaped with the golden ears of maize, or roots of the cassava, covered the floor; while on rude shelves were stowed away simple fabrics of the Indian loom, matings, and rolls of cotton cloth fantastically dyed; and in one, the most secret nook, protected by a wooden door, a mass of glittering ornaments, some wrought of the purest gold, and others of the adulterated metal, which the savages termed *guanin*, breastplates, and crowns, and bracelets, enough to have satisfied the avarice insatiate of a Pizarro or a Cortez.

Nor were these all; for visible amid the darkness, by the rays which there own gorgeous substance concentrated, lay bars and ingots, and large wedges of virgin metal, besides a pile of unwrought ore, gleaming with massy veins, of value utterly incalculable.

Slight was the glance which the young Spaniard cast upon these more than kingly treasures — a single crevice opening to the outer air, had been to him a discovery more precious than the concentrated wealth of all the mighty mines of the new world — a single coat of plate, with helmet and buckler, and a good Spanish blade to match them, he would have clutched with hand that scorned the richer metal — but these were not; and he turned from the cacique's treasury with a heedless air, to resume his hitherto unprofitable search.

Not far did he go, however, before another wooden door presented itself, closed only by an artificial latch, which yielded instantly to his impatient fingers. It opened, and before him spread a huge and stately hall, far such it seemed, wide as the cloistered chancel of some gothic pile, and loftier; walled, paved, and vaulted by the primeval hand of nature, first and unrivaled architect, with the eternal granite. Unlike the outer chamber, obscure or dimly seen by half-excluded daylight, this apartment was flooded with pure, all pervading sunshine, which poured in, unpolluted and unvailed, through the vast natural arch which terminated the superb arcade.

His heart leaped, as it seemed, with the vast joy of the moment, into his very throat. All suffering, all anxiety all woe was instantly gone! for he was free! free as the fresh summer winds that wantoned round his head, free with the perfumes of a thousand flowery hills! free as the glowing sunshine that streamed in so gloriously through that portal!

With a quick step and bounding pulse, he leaped toward the open air: he reached! he stood upon the threshold! Wherefore that sudden start, wherefore that ashy pallor pervading brow, and cheek, and lip! One other step, and he had been precipitated hundreds of feet from the sheer verge of the huge rock, which fell a perpendicular descent of ninety fathoms, down to the cultured plain below. His feet were tottering now upon the very brink, and it required

more than ordinary effort of his strong active frame, to check the impulse of his forward motion, which had been so impetuously swift, that but a little more would have sufficed to hurl him into empty air.

With a dull, leaden weight, that sudden disappointment crushed down the burning aspirations of his soul — his heart fell sick within him — he clasped his hands over his throbbing temples — he was again a captive. It was, however, but for a moment that he was unmanned; before a second had elapsed, he was engaged with all his energies in the examination of the smallest peculiarities of the place, hoping, alas! in vain, that he should still discover some path whereby to quit his prison-house. But not the faintest track — not the most slight projection, whence to plant a foot, was there; above, below, to right and left of that huge arch, the massy precipice was smooth and hard and slippery as glass.

After a minute inspection, the Spaniard was reluctantly compelled to own to his excited hopes, which vain would have delivered themselves, that nothing had been gained by his discovery beyond the power of gazing forth over the beauties of that boundless scene, which stretched away for miles and miles, beneath his feet to the blue waters of the ocean, which lost themselves in turn in the limitless azure of the cloudless skies. Wistfully did he strain his eyes over the wide-spread *plain*, which, from that lofty eminence, stretched map like and distinct; its every variation of hill, or sloping upland, tangled ravine, or broad and fertile valley, clearly delineated by the undulations of those mighty shadows, which, thrown by the strong sunshine from a hundred sweeping clouds, — careered, like giant wings, over the glittering landscape.

Many an Indian village did he mark, nestling beneath the umbrage of its sheltering palms, or perched upon some bold projection, around the base of which murmured, with chafing waters, some one of those bright streams, hundreds of which might be seen glancing gold-like to the morning sun. But though he gazed till his eyes ached, he could descry no tokens of his countrymen. The settlements of Isabella were either too far distant to be reached by any human glance, or were, more probably, concealed by some dark, forest-mantled hill, for he could neither discern them, nor even recognize the curvature of the fair bay on which they stood.

Suddenly, while he lingered yet over the distant prospect, a faint sound burst upon his ear — a sound oft heard and forgotten; though so faint, that now it scarcely rose above the whisper of the breeze, waving the myriad tree-tops of that untrodden solitude, and the small voice of the far river, whose angry roar was mellowed by the influence of distance, into a soft and soothing murmur. He started and glanced hurriedly around — again that sound — nearer and clearer than before — the remote din of ordnance!

Toward the east he gazed; and there, winding their quiet way through the calm waters in close proximity to the green margin of the isle, he saw four caravels, with every snow-white sail spreading

to the fevering gales, with fluttering signals streaming from their mast-heads, and by their oft-repeated salves, soliciting the notice of their countrymen.

It was — it was, past doubt, the squadron of Columbus — long wished for, and arrived too late! That squadron which he had so fondly, anxiously desired, the pledge and sanction of his nuptials with his adored — Guanica. Yes, it was even now making its destined harbor; while he a hopeless captive, lay in a living tomb, his fate unknown, his prison unsuspected — and she, his dark-eyed love, endured he knew not what, of disappointed love, of intense yearning, and of hope deferred — perchance of barbarous outrage, prompted by the suspicion or the jealousy of her wild kinsmen.

Hopeless although he was, he watched these caravels with a gaze as eagerly solicitous as that which the benighted sailor keeps on the beacon of his safety — while, one by one, they were lost to his sight behind some towering promontory, and reappeared again, each after each, glittering forth with all their white sails skimming in the meridian light. At length he might behold them shortening sail, as though their haven were at hand. By and by they shot into the shadow of a wide wood-crowned hill; and, though the watcher kept his post until the sun was bending down toward the western verge of the horizon, they issued not again upon the azure waters, beyond that mass of frowning verdure.

With a heart sicker than before, he had already turned away, in order to go back into the outer cavern, when a sharp, whizzing sound beside him, attracted his attention, and ere he could look round, the long shaft of a Carib arrow splintered itself against the rocky archway, and fell in fragments to his feet. The first glance of the dauntless Spaniard was outward, to descry, if possible, the archer who had launched that missile, and with so true an aim! Nor was he long in doubt — for, perched upon a projecting crag of the same line of cliffs, wherein was perforated the wide cave within the mouth of which he stood, a hundred yards, at the least calculation, distant, he saw the Carib boy, who had so kindly ministered to his most pressing wants during the toilsome march of the past day. A quiver was suspended from his shoulders, and a long Indian bow was yet raised in his right hand to the level of his eye — but by the friendly wafture of his left, he seemed to deprecate the notion that he was hostilely inclined.

Again he waved his hand aloft, pointed toward the broken arrow, and, turning hastily away, was out of sight before Hernandez could reply to his brief amicable gestures. As soon as he had reused his scattered energies of mind, the Spaniard turned his attention to the fragments of the splintered shaft, and instantly discovered a small packet securely fastened to the flint head. Tearing it thence with eager haste, touched in the Spanish tongue, and traced upon the scrap of parchment by a well-remembered hand, he read the following sentences: —

“Be of good cheer — friends are about us. When the moon sets to-night, watch at the cavern mouth — a clew of thread shall be conveyed to thee, by which thou shalt draw up a cord sufficient for thy weight — means of escape shall await thee at the cliff’s foot — these, through the Carib, Orazimbo, from thine ALONSO.”

He tore the billet on the instant, into the smallest fragments and, lest some prying eye should fall on its contents, scattered it piecemeal through the rocky porch to the free winds of heaven. This done, he looked around him carefully for some projection of the rock whereunto he might fix the rope, on which he was to wing his flight down that precipitous abyss, that no time might be wasted when the appointed hour should come for the adventure. He soon discovered a tall stalactitic pillar, close to the brink of the descent, the strength of which he tested by the exertion of his utmost power.

Satisfied now that he had nothing more to do, but to avoid suspicion and to wait the actions of his friends without, he returned instantly to the exterior cave, and secured the door with care. Then dragging back the cotton mattress, on which he had slept the preceding night, into the darkest angle of the prison he stretched himself on it to await, as patiently as might be, the approach of evening. Not long had he lain there, before a grim-visaged, old, wrinkled warrior entered with a supply of food and water. Without a word, this tawny jailer deposited his load upon the rocky floor, and then, with uncouth courtesy, applied fresh bandages besmeared with some sweet-scented Indian salve, which acted almost magically to the refreshment of the wound upon the wrist, which had been pierced by the Carib arrow.

Having done this, he peered about with silent scrutiny into each angle and recess of the cave-dungeon. Then, having severely tested the strength of the wooden barriers, swung to, and locked the heavy lattice, and departed. Slowly the hours of daylight lagged away; but to the slowest and the longest term, its end must come; and gradually the long shadows, which the setting sun threw over the green landscape, melted into the dimness of the universal gloom. One by one the stars came out in the dark azure firmament, and all was still and sweet and breathless. Anon, the moon came forth, climbing the arch of heaven in her pure beauty, and bathing all on earth in peaceful glory.

It seemed to the excited spirit of Hernando, as if she never would complete her transit over the deep blue skies; and it was with no small exertion that he compelled himself to wait the time appointed.

Well for him was it, that he did so! for when she had attained her central height, a band of dusky warriors, with the great cacique, Caonobo, at their head, all armed with spears and war-clubs, and equipped with many and bright torches, paused at the grated entrance, and summoned him to show himself to them, his captors

After this measure, evidently of precaution, he was left quite alone and shortly fell asleep, for a short space, although his slumbers were disturbed and broken; and the moon had not set, although her lower rim was sinking fast into the forest, when he woke.

Cautiously he peered out through the dungeon gate, to see that all was still without, ere he should seek his post; then satisfied that no spies were upon the watch, he noiselessly unlocked the inner door, fastened it softly after him, and stealing through the larger cavern, showed his tall figure in the archway, just as the last ray of the moon glanced on the cliffs around him, ere she should disappear. She sank, and all was gloom. A moment, and a shrill sharp whistle rang on the night air; and again a shaft whizzed past him, and fell harmless.

A slight thread was attached to it, which fathom after fathom he drew in, until a stronger line supplanted its place, and next a stout cord, and at length the promised rope!

With eager hands he gathered it, link after link, coil after coil, fastened it to the lofty stalactite, and after having tried by a sudden jerk the safety of the knot, leaped forth over the rocky brink, to see if thence he might descry aught of his trusty friends! Diminished by the distance, into a twinkling gleam, scarce larger than the fire-fly's spark, at the crags base, there blazed a single torch; and this slight glimmer seen, without one word or doubt, the dauntless youth grasped the stout cable and launched himself over the perilous brink, into the viewless bosom of the air. The rope had been prepared with knots at each foot of its length, through every one of which was thrust a tough bamboo, forming a rude extempore step-ladder. These facilitated somewhat the descent, into that black, and, as it seemed, bottomless abyss, but was still perilous in the extreme, and yet less perilous than fearful. Steadily, however, did Hernando, grasping the short rungs with an iron gripe, and planting his feet one by one, descended that fearful ladder; nor, till he stood unscathed on the firm soil below, did his brain reel, or his stout nerves tremble. There, on his recovering from the transient tremor and bewilderment that fell upon him, he found himself clasped in the fond arms of the faithful Guarica; while round him gathered the bold page, Alonso, and Orazimbo, the true Carib boy. Guarica's youthful brother, who had designed with skill, and with success accomplished, this desperate adventure of escape.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ESCAPE

BRIEF time had the young Spaniard and his Indian princess for explanation or for converse; for while she was yet clasped to his grateful breast, in the first sweet embrace of love, a long, wild yell rang far into the bosom of the night from the cave above, and the broad glare of a hundred torches, tumultuously brandished by as many strong and savage hands, disclosed to the eyes of the astonished fugitives the fierce cacique himself, surrounded by the flower of his wild chivalry, armed at all points with bow, and buckler, war-club, and javelin, and pile, thronging the rocky threshold of that deserted dungeon.

Each swarthy figure stood out revealed on that bold eminence like animated sculptures of the far-famed Corinthian brass, the sinewy frames, the well-developed muscles, nay more, the very features and expression of every stern cacique, the plumed crests and pictured quiver, all clearly visible, and palpably defined against the fierce red glow which formed the background to that animated picture.

Brief time was there, indeed, for instantly discovering the mode by which the fugitive had left his place of confinement, and guessing, as it seemed, that his flight was but recent — for though the crimson glare of the resinous torches rendered the group above as visible as daylight could have done, it lacked the power to penetrate the gleam which veiled the little knot of beings at the base of that huge precipice. Two of the boldest of the great cacique's followers addressed themselves to the pursuit by the same fearful and precarious ladder, while many others might be seen casting aside the heavier portions of their dress and armature, and gliding up their loins in preparation for a similar purpose.

"Haste, haste, Hernando," whispered the Indian maiden, in a voice that fairly trembled with agitation — "haste to you thicket by the stream! fly thou, Alonso, and aid our comrades! Come, Grazimbo — brother!"

And as she spoke, grasping her lover by the arm, she hurried him away to a dense mass of thorny brushwood which, overtopped with many a vine and many a tangled creeper, clothed the bank of a wide, howling streamlet, which flowed with a loud and incessant murmur, though in a slender volume, over a bed of gravel and

small rocky fragments detached, in the lapse of ages, from the crag that overhung it. Here, fastened to the branches, stood three Spanish chargers, equipped with the lightest housings then in use, except that one, in addition to the saddle, was provided with a velvet cushion attached to the cantle, and kept in its place by a thong, securing it to the richly-plated crupper.

"Mount, mount, Alonso!" cried the maiden; "stay not to hold your master's stirrup — mount, and delay not — every minute, now, is worth a human life!"

While yet the words were on her lips, the page had leaped into his saddle; and, swinging her slight form, with scarce an effort, to the croup of the tall charger, Hernando, without setting foot in the stirrup, vaulted into the saddle before her; grasped the reins firmly with a practiced hand, and stirring his steel's mettle with the spur, rode on a few paces down the channel of the stream till he had reached a place clear from the overtopping brushwood. The boy, Alonso, followed hard on his traces, leading the third horse by the bridle at his side.

"Where—oh, where tarries Orazimbo?" whispered again the Carib maiden, in the sweet low music of her native tongue; "without him all is naught!"

Ere she had well done speaking, they had cleared the thicket, and by the strong illumination of the lights above, a fearful scene was rendered visible. The foremost two of their pursuers were half way down the hill, while three more of their followers had commenced the perilous descent, and were now hanging to the apex most rung! But where was Orazimbo? for, though the torchlight was of far more avail to them who profited by its partial lustre from a distance, than to those whose eyes, blinded by its near presence looked abroad vainly into the surrounding darkness, the bottom of the precipice and all the thicket round were buried in impenetrable gloom. Where, where was Orazimbo?

A sharp twang broke the silence which had succeeded to the yell of the infuriated Indians — a keen, sharp ringing twang! a hurtling sound, as of some missile in quick motion, followed — a long dark streak was seen almost immediately glancing, within the circling radiance of the torches, toward the leading Carib, — at the next instant he relaxed his hold — a piercing yell of anguish and despair pealed up to the dark heavens. Head foremost the twangy figure of the savage plunged earthward — and the soft, heavy, plashing noise with which it struck the soil announced, as plainly as the clearest words could tell, that not one bone remained unbroken after that fearful fall! Another twang — and yet another — and, almost simultaneously with the small shrill voice of the fatal cord, another, and another of the wretched Indians, transixed by the unerring shaft of Orazimbo, were precipitated from their slight hold — one shrieking hopelessly but incessantly through the deaf air until the awful crash finished his cries and agonies together — one

mute in his stern despair. Daunted by the deadly archery of their unseen enemy, and ignorant how many foes were launching death, at every shot, among them, the survivors retreated up the ladder with wild haste.

When they reached the summit, a long-drawn yell, strangely expressive of malice frustrated, and disappointed vengeance, told those who heard it from below, that they had abandoned that precarious method of pursuit. Another moment, and the light passed away from the verge, and a loud burst of dissonant and angry voices, receding rapidly, betokened that the pursuers had turned off to some easier exit from their hill-fortress.

Secured, thus, by the bravery and foresight of her stripling brother, from a pursuit so instantaneous that escape would have been scarce possible, Guarica called aloud, no longer fearing to betray their proximity to the enemy by her words.

"Hasten, good brother, hasten! We tarry for thee, Orazimbo!" and guided by the accents of her well known voice, panting from the rapidity of his previous motions, and from agitation in a scarcely less degree, with his full quiver rattling on his naked shoulders, and the long bow which had, of late, done such good service, swinging at his back, the Carib prince dashed down the slight declivity, and wreathing his hand lightly in the courser's mane, bounded at once upon his back.

"Follow, Guarica, follow me close; there is no time for words!" he exclaimed, as he snatched the bridle, and dashing at once into a gallop, drove down the pebbly channel of the stream — the small stones and the water flashing high into the air at every stroke of the fleet steel, and indicating to Hernando the direction which his guide had taken.

No easy task was it, however, to ride at the fierce pace which Orazimbo had taken up, down that wild water-course. Though the streamlet was so shallow that it barely reached the horse's knees, the rugged inequalities of its bed — here thickly interspersed with rough and craggy fragments, here paved with round and slippery boulders, and there with broad, smooth ledges of hard, slaty rock, polished by the incessant rippling of the current, till ice itself would have afforded a less treacherous foothold, rendered it perilous indeed, save to a cavalier of the first order, to put a horse to his speed among its numerous obstacles.

At first the youthful Spaniard could not conceive the cause which should have tempted Orazimbo to lead him by so strange a path; but, busy as he was in holding up and guiding the stout charger which nobly bore his double freight, his mind was actively employed. Almost on the instant he remembered the warlike instinct, scarcely inferior to the scent of the sagacious bloodhound, with which the Carib tribes were wont to follow on the track of any fugitive, and he saw the wisdom of this singular precaution.

For something more than two hours they dashed on unwearied

through the sparkling waters, which, driven far aloft, had dragged all their garments from buskin to the very plume — the stream now winding in bold curves through rich and fair savannas, now diving into the deepest and most devious shades of underwood and forest. Still on they dashed, whether the free night wind, laden with its freight of ten thousand dewy blossoms, sweeping across the open meadows, brought freshness to their heated brows, or the damp mist-wreaths of the steaming forest chilled the very life-blood in their veins. Still on they dashed, rousing the wild-fowl from their sedge haunts on the stream's margin, scattering the flocks of night from their almost impervious roosts, till now the stars began to pale their ineffectual fires, and a faint streak of woe on the eastern sky to tell of coming day. They reached a smooth green vega, broader than they had yet passed or seen, and here, for the first time, Orazimbo paused from his headlong race.

"All is well, now, Guarica — pursuit is far behind; three leagues hence, just beyond that fringe of wood which you may see glooming dark against the opening mora, tarry your gallant kinsmen, I on Hernando. Many would blame us for the deeds which we have wrought in thy behalf, young Spaniard. But Cacabo, by his iron will, has made us allies, and for this day at least our forces are united." Then turning to Guarica, he added, "All peril is over for a space; and if thou art weary, my sweet sister, here may we rest awhile."

"No, no!" Guarica interrupted him, breathless from the wild speed at which they had thus far journeyed. "No, no! no, no! we will not pause till we have reached the cavaliers."

"At least, however," interposed Hernando, using the Indian tongue, which was no less familiar to him than his native language — "at least, let us, if we be free from present danger, ride somewhat gently, in order that our steeds may so regain their wind and be in ease again to bear stoutly, if aught should call for fresh exertion of their mettle."

"Be it so," answered Orazimbo, turning his horse's head, and riding, as he spoke, up the green margin of the rivulet, till he stood on the level meadow, where he was joined immediately by his companions — "be it so. Well, I am assured no foe can have followed with such speed as to be less than two leagues distant from our rear — and on this open plain none can approach us undetected. One hour's advance will bring us to a band of our faithful Caribs, under the bold Aroneta, that would condemn the might of Cacabo's power."

Taking the lead, he trotted gently forward; the daylight brightening more and more, till the great sun burst from the cloudy veil that enshrouded his bright orient chamber, and filled the earth with light and rejoicing. Oh, how sweet, to the very fugitives, was that glad sun-burst; awakening, as it did, upon the instant, the matutinal chorus of ten thousand joyous warblers, and calling forth unnumber

ed odors from the uprising flowers, which had lain sad and scentless during the absence of that glorious bridegroom. Hope, which had languished in their bosoms during the long night hours, was now at once transmuted, by nature's wonderful alchemist, into gay, cheery confidence. Love, which, oppressed by doubt, anxiety, and care, had been remembered only to aggravate their sorrows and enhance their apprehensions, resumed, beneath that gladsome light, its more legitimate and wonted function, and, before many moments had elapsed, Hernando was recounting to the attentive ears of the sweet girl his confident and certain expectation of an immediate termination to all the obstacles which had thus far opposed their union, while he inquired eagerly into the late mysterious history of his surprise, imprisonment, and rescue.

Few words sufficed to make all clear. Chance alone — blind and sudden chance had brought about his capture — a chance which had, in fact, preserved the Spanish settlements from certain peril — probable destruction. Apprised of the relaxed discipline, and contemptuous negligence of military usages, which had reigned in the garrison during the absence of its great commander, the wily Cacoma had assembled all his bold tributary hordes, and was even then in full march to commence an onslaught on walls which he would most assuredly have found mounted with culverins unloaded, and watched, or unwatched rather, by sentinels unarmed, and sleeping. But the delay occasioned by the death of Don Guzman and the capture of Hernando had proved fatal to his enterprise. The brave page, whose escape seemed almost a miracle, had carried swift warning to the fort, and, before ten minutes had passed by the tocsin called the garrison to arms; the guns were scaled and loaded; and with his own peculiar band of fleet and fiery skirmishers, Ojela, the captain in command, mounted to ride forth and scour the country.

Ere he had ridden forth, however, Don Guzman's servitor came at a furious gallop from the scene of action, having escaped, though not unwounded, by dint of desperate sparring from the wild chieftain's archery. From his report, the truth of all Alonso's tidings was now confirmed past doubt, and the gallant partisan dashed out in the vain hope of securing his bold companion. Nor, though too late for this, did he fail to avenge him; for after sweeping many a league of forest and savanna with his fleet chivalry, he had, near midnight, met the retreating force of Cuonobo, who, satisfied that the meeting of the Spaniards was wholly unconnected with his onslaught, having detached a hundred of his men to escort his much-valued captive, was hurrying back to swoop, as he fancied, on his unprepared foemen in the dead of night.

Charging immediately with lance in rest, although his little band numbered not one sixteenth part of the Carib forces, Ojela, like a thunderbolt, drove through them; and, as they fled diverse, dividing his small party into companies of five, pursued them fiercely with a hot fire of pistols, until they reached the shelter of the swamps or thickets, impervious to the chargers of their steel-clad enemies.

Fifty slain Indians and a single captive attested the rash Spaniard's prowess, ere the moon had risen, within the walls of Isabella.

Meantime the page had dashed forward with his tidings to the forest-home of Guarica, lifting her at once from despair to the brightest hopes. She was free — forever free from the hated union which had threatened her, while the man she loved had escaped his bitterest enemy and was within the possibility of a rescue. She told him, furthermore, how her sullen impulse had been carried out for his advantage — how she had disguised herself and fled from that hateful festive scene, and, with Alonso, sought out her brother among his people of the forest.

Yielding to her prayers, Orazimbo had left the duty of gathering his people to Aroneta, and disguising himself, had joined the band of Caribs, which was conveying her lover to Caonobo's fortresses in the mountains. After his incarceration, Orazimbo had joined her and the page, where the plan which resulted in his escape had been arranged.

No time was to be lost, for the infuriate Caonobo, whom Orazimbo, hurrying homeward, had met on his retreat, baffled, and desperate, and bent on vengeance, had openly declared, that on the third day thence, he would march with ten thousand followers, and slay his captive before the very walls of Isabella, and in sight of his helpless countrymen, with the most direful tortures. The simple plan was soon arranged, and in pursuance of it, Orazimbo forthwith returned to the hill-fortress, where he was destined to watch constantly for an occasion of communicating with the prisoner. This was speedily and thoroughly effected. The horses, with Guarica, had been secreted in the thicket, by a plan preconcerted, as soon as the night had become dark enough to veil their movements. Ojeda, who had come so far with her, returning to array his troop, and cover their retreat as soon as he was well assured that the escape of his companion from the dungeon was well nigh certain, and that his presence on the spot would hinder rather than advance their flight.

All this Hernando soon learned from his sweet companion, and as they careered easily and freely over the fair green plain which stretched for miles around them, and on whose broad champaign existed neither dingle, brake, nor glen, to shade a lurking foe-man. The certainty of safety and of freedom lent wings to the young lover's buoyant and ecstatic soul. Well mounted, and well armed with weapons of defense — for, with his charger, the bold and wary partisan had failed not to send rapier, and pistols, and battle-axe — he would have cared but little had he been destined to fall in with a score of roving Indians — but, as it seemed, no such encounter was to be looked for — much less apprehended.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE.

THE wide savannah was already passed, and at the verge of the forest within a short half-mile of the spot where Ojeda waited their arrival, with ears and soul intent on every sound that might betoken their approach, the fugitives had to cross a narrow streamlet, running through deep and wooded banks. Orazimbo, who, as their guide, had led the way, was in the middle of the ford, while Hernando, with the maiden, was descending the steep path which led to it, when the well-known twang of the Indian bow was heard, and an arrow whizzed through the air so truly aimed, that it passed through the Spaniard's high-crowned hat.

"Push on," cried the quick-witted youth, upon the instant — "push on, boy, to close quarters;" and as he spoke, snatching a pistol from his holster, he dashed his spurs into his horse's flanks, and passing Orazimbo in mid channel, drove up the opposite ascent, followed by his page, sword in hand.

Then from the brushwood rose a loud, wild yell accompanied by a flight of the long Carib shafts: close to the head and breast of De Leon they hurtled, but none took effect on him, or on Alonso. A sharp twang from the rear, followed almost immediately by a splash in the shallow water; and then, with bridle loose, the steed of Orazimbo darted at a fierce gallop onward. Scarcely had Hernando reached the brow of the ravine, before, with leveled pikes and brandished war-clubs, a dozen Caribs rushed against him, and one more daring than his fellows seized on his bridle-rein. Not half a second did he keep his hold, for, leveled at a hand's breadth of his head, Hernando's pistol flashed with unerring aim — the bullet crashed through the Indian's temple, and he fell, without a word or groan, beneath the charger's feet.

Rising, upon the instant, in his stirrups, the bold cavalier hurled, with a sure and steady hand, the discharged weapon in the face of his next opponent, and before he had even seen the effect, although it felled him stunned and heaving to the earth, unsheathed his trusty rapier with one hand, while with the other, casting his bridle loose, he drew and discharged fatally his second pistol.

All this had passed with the speed of light; and Alonso, having, at the same time, cut down the first of his assailants, the Indians

broke away on all sides, and it seemed as if they would have effected their escape; and so, in fact, they might have done, had the young Spaniard chosen to abandon Orazimbo to his fate; but such was not his nature. Raising his charger up, he turned his head, and called aloud upon the faithful Indian; at the same point of time, the Caribs, who had scattered diverse before his headlong charger, began again to rally, and one, the boldest of their number, fitting an arrow to his bow-string, drew it with steady and swift aim quite to the head, the chord twanged sharply, and the shaft took effect, right in the broad chest of the war-horse, transfixing his embroidered pelt; and long he fell to earth, and as he fell, the savages, gaining fresh courage, made a simultaneous rush upon the hapless rider.

So speedily, however, had the skillful soldier regained his foothold, and so powerfully did he wield his rapier, that they still dared to close with him absolutely. Not so, however, with the fair Gurica, for, dislodged from her seat by the shock of the charger's downfall, she had been thrown to some yards' distance, and seized, as soon as she had touched the ground, by a gigantic savage. All athirst for vengeance and for blood, as brandished his poisonous weapon round his head, in very act to smite; while, hampered by their numerous numbers, neither Hernando nor the page could possibly assist her in this fearful crisis.

Just at this moment, the thick, fast beating tramp of many horses, at full gallop, was heard by both parties, and the continuous crashing of the brushwood, through which, with furious speed, a band of Europeans were, it was evident, advancing. The near sounds, it would seem, inspired both parties with fresh vigor — the savages trying to finish their fell work before they should come up to the rescue, the Spaniards gaining confidence and hope from the vicinity of friends.

Too late, however, would the arrival of Ojeda on the scene of action have proved to save Gurica; though now he might be seen within two hundred yards, plying his bloody spurs, and brandishing aloft his formidable rapier. Thrice did Hernando rush upon the Indians in the vain hope of securing his promised bribe, striking down, at each charge, a Carib warrior; but each time he was driven back by force of irresistible numbers. Nothing could have saved Gurica from sure death, but that Orazimbo, who had received only a flesh wound, sprang from the channel of the stream, armed with a Spanish blade. Though faint and staggering, he plied his keen sword with such mortal energy, that all shrank back from its downright descent. The chief who had seized Gurica, and whose averted head beheld not the approach of this new combatant, received the full sway of its sheer edge on his bended neck. Through muscle, spine, and marrow, the trenchant blade drove unresisted; losing his grasp upon his captive, he dropped dead without a word or struggle, and carried onward by his own impetus, the Carib boy fell over him, and lay beside him. A second more, and with their battle-cry, "Saint

Jago," the fiery Spaniards were upon them — and not only the Spaniards, but a terrible array of friendly Caribs, who, under Arometa, joined in with their sharp war-ry and deadly weapons — with flash and shot, stab and stroke, till not an enemy remained alive upon the bank of that small stream, which late so pure and lucid, flowed now all dark, curdled, and thick with human gore.

But the battle was not yet either lost or won. A fresh relay of Caribs, headed by Caonobo himself, rushed like a tornado into the affray. With whoop and cry and a storm of deadly weapons they fell to their death work, burning to avenge the rout of their companions. Now the fight became general. The savage of the mountain grappled fiercely with the Carib of the plains. Spanish cavalier and half-clothed Indian came to close quarters. The struggle threatened to prove fatal to the Europeans; but when it was most desperate, Arometa who had been rallying his followers after their victory, came rushing back and poured his forces into the melee. In the midst of this contest, the cacique Caonobo fought like a tiger at the head of his forces. With his broad flint hatchet grasped in his red hand, seeking for some victim worthy of his prowess, his fiery glance fell on Orazimbo, who had planted himself in front of Guarica, whom Hernando had caught in his arms, and was defending with his disengaged hand.

With a wild whoop Caonobo sprang toward the boy. One sweep of his battle-ax, and his savage rule over the Caribs would be undisputed. The battle-ax, formed swift circles in the air, as the mighty savage bounded forward, his plumely crown dancing in the wind, and his colossal form towering high above his followers.

Now his tawny arm swung the murderous weapon with a sure aim, but as it was descending with all its terrible force on that young head, Arometa, wild and firm and brave as himself, sprang to the rescue. One tremendous swing of his spiked war-club, and it rushed down upon that gorgeously coronated head, breaking in the skull, and crushing all that fearful strength in a breath of time.

As Caonobo fell headlong to the earth, a cry went up from his followers, so wild and startling that, for a moment, the strife was checked, and each murderous arm held suspended in its death-work.

Each Carib follower of Caonobo understood the meaning of the sound, and his half-raised weapon fell. Even the victors felt a sort of regret when the great chief was conquered, and lost all wish to prolong the struggle. Thus the body of Caonobo was carried off by his followers, and no one interposed; but the mournful death-cry rising in one united chorus from the battle-ground, was answered by a funeral wail deep in the forest. One by one the Caribs left the ground. Then Orazimbo and Arometa swept their followers into the morning sun: thus by one sudden act of courage and decision securing the dominion over a whole people, which was his birthright. The next day, high in the fastness which had made his uncle's power impregnable, Orazimbo was proclaimed unanimously cacique.

When the band of Spanish cavaliers reached Isabella, it was to find the inhabitants in a state of resolute preparation; for they each moment expected an attack from the Carib insurgents. Those Spaniards who lived outside the fort, had sought protection within its walls. Among those who stood ready to receive the victorious band, was Don Juan Rodriques, and a stately figure gorgeously clad in scarlet; with much embroidery in lace and gold — stood in advance of the others, as if he had been commander of the fortress.

Hernando's heart leaped as he saw this man. It was not the gorgeous dress, the scarlet lace or gold, which caused that thrill of the nerves, but the long locks of snow, shading that broad and massive brow — the air of conscious dignity and inborn worth — the impress of unutterable thought united to invincible resolve, that stamped upon that face and figure a natural majesty exceeding that of princes — a majesty becoming the discoverer of a world.

"Look up, Guarica — look up, and fear nothing," whispered Hernando to the maiden, who grew pale and began to tremble with dread of her father's wrath. "It is Christopher Columbus — all must be well."

And so it was; for that night Guarica was betrothed to Hernando de Leon, with all due ceremony, in the fortress of Isabella.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

It was a glorious day for Hispaniola, when the wedding of De Leon and Guarica took place in the fortress of Isabella; for on that day Orazimbo brought his people in thousands down from the fastnesses, to witness a treaty of amity and peace between himself as cacique and Christopher Columbus.

From the encampments in the edge of the forests, the Carib tribes saw the voluminous flag of Spain floating over the battlements of the fort, side by side, with a broad crimson pennant, which Orazimbo had that day adopted as an insignia of his sovereignty.

While the great leaders of the different tribes were entertained in the fort, the Indians pursued their pastimes out of doors, full of enthusiasm and trust in the young chief, who with his counselor, Aroaeta, had gone among the Spaniards to treat for the general welfare.

Within the fort, all was harmony and good will. Don Juan had not only consented to the union of his daughter with De Leon, but

had been brought to look upon it as a bond of perpetual union between the power of his son and that of Spain, to which she would be fully consigned.

To the inhabitants of Isabella, the occasion presented a double jubilee. The exchange of a treaty which secured the entire safety, and a union which bound the natives' interests with that of the Spaniards, were events that might well prove subjects of rejoicing.

Every thing grand or sumptuous in the possession of the Spaniards, was brought forth to grace the occasion, and gathered in the great hall of the fortress. Columbus, in his most sumptuous array, and glittering with the jeweled orders bestowed as an acknowledgment of his success, stood with Don Juan, Orazimbo and Aroneta, waiting for the bridal pair to appear, that they might, with all the gay company that filled the hall, follow them to the chapel of the fortress, where a priest stood ready to perform the marriage ceremony. At length the folding doors were flung open, and the young couple appeared, followed by Spanish and Carib maidens, pages and chiefs, in equal companionship.

Hernando was in full Spanish costume, rich in color, and glittering with gold, a plume of white feathers flowed from the cap of crimson velvet, which he had just given his page to carry, and the collar of some noble order gleamed on his bosom. Indeed he stood, in all respects, the fitting mate of the beautiful maiden by his side. Those wedding garments, like her beauty, partook somewhat of her double nationality. The robe of royal purple, damasked with a network of golden flowers, was arranged with the classical grace so natural to her Carib habits; but rich lace shaded somewhat her shoulders and bosom, while robes of pearls and bracerets of blazing jewels gave a degree of barbaric magnificence to her appearance. But all this was nothing to the brilliant happiness that lighted her face and filled her velvety eyes with the brooding starlight of love.

As the couple advanced up the room, Columbus took a tiara from its cushion held by a page, and advancing to meet them, placed it on the beautiful head of the bride, who bent, blushing, to receive the honor assigned by the court of Spain for the first maiden of the princely Carib line who should wed a high-born subject of the mother country.

Then Orazimbo came forward, followed by two Carib Indians, who bore between them — their great strength almost yielding to the weight — ingots and rough lumps of pure gold, such as Hernando had seen in the fortress cave of Caonabo during his imprisonment there.

"My father has great wealth with which to endow his daughter," said the young cacique, with dignity; "but a Carib princess must not go to the Spaniard without some dowry from the people of her mother."

With these words Orazimbo bent, with something of courtliness, learned by his associations with the stranger, and lifting Guarica's

held to his lips, motioned the Indians to step aside with their treasures.

After this, the marriage procession was about to pass on, but was checked by the chief Aroneta, who, taking the "golden belt" from his bosom, bade Hernando clasp it around the waist of his Carib bride as a pledge of perpetual unity between her people and his.

Hernando took the belt with becoming thanks, and while clasping it around the waist of his bride, whispered, "this day thou art nomencl, sweet one, with double circlets of gold, but only that thy happiness may be more complete." Garica did not answer, but the bright tears swelled to her eyes as she cast an eloquent glance first upon her bridegroom, and then upon the Carib chief.

Now the procession moved on toward the chapel, and there, in the perfumed smoke of swinging censers, and in the pure light of many a holy taper, the last bond that ever sanctioned a treaty of peace, was sealed by those young lips.

The ceremony over, lord and lady, soldier and servant, all followed the young couple to the ramparts, and there, while they stood beneath the united banners, with Orzambo on one hand, and Christopher Columbus on the other, the silver-mouthed trumpets pealed forth joyous tidings of their union, followed by a mighty shout which made the air vibrate from battlement to forest. From wood and plain, ravine and hill, that glorious shout was taken up and answered by ten thousand Carib voices, till the broad reverberation made the very trees of the forest tremble to the general rejoicing.

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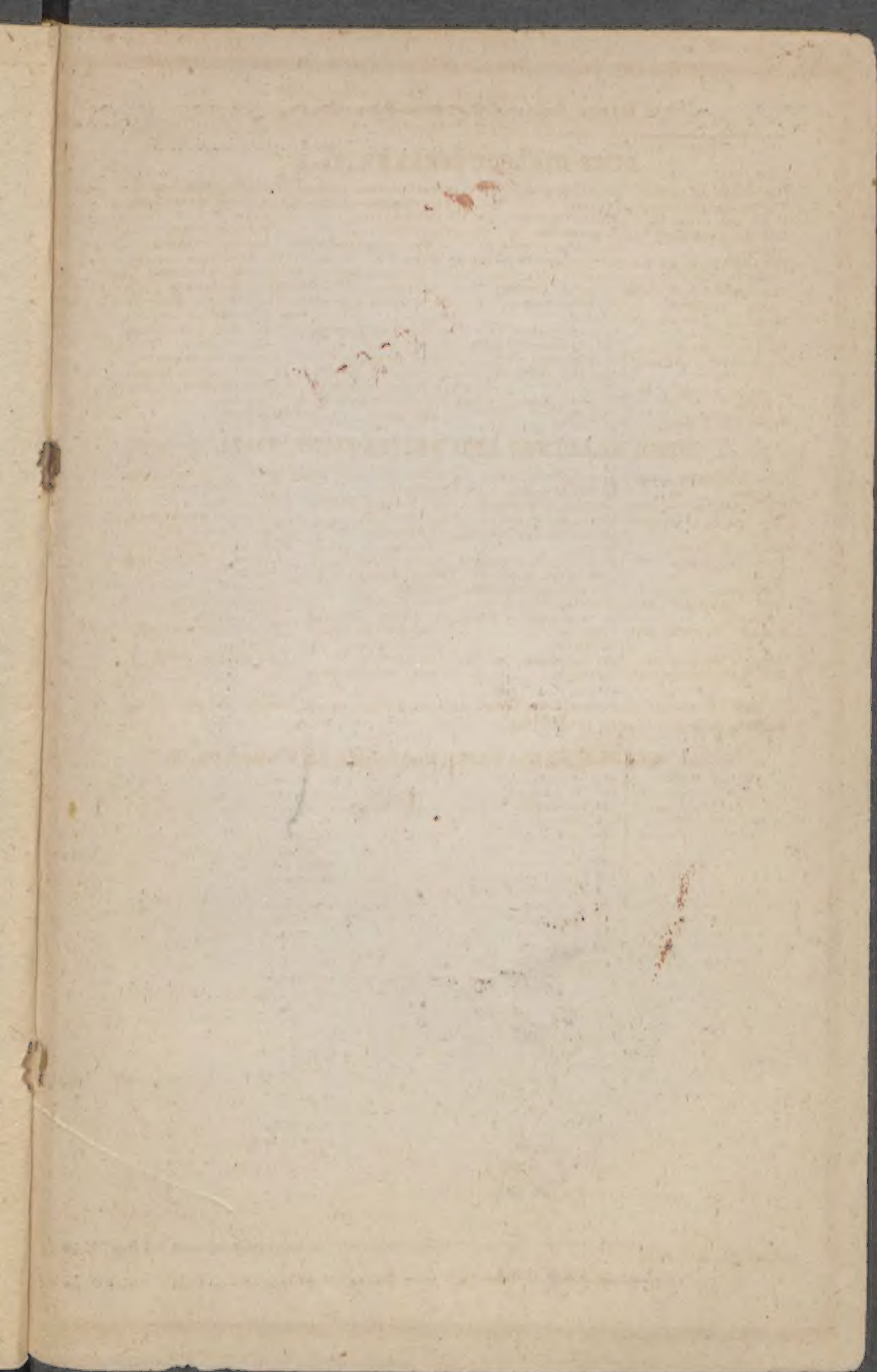
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